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THE media circus surrounding the execution of Timothy McVeigh, America's top murderer, is the most nauseating event in the history of civilisation.

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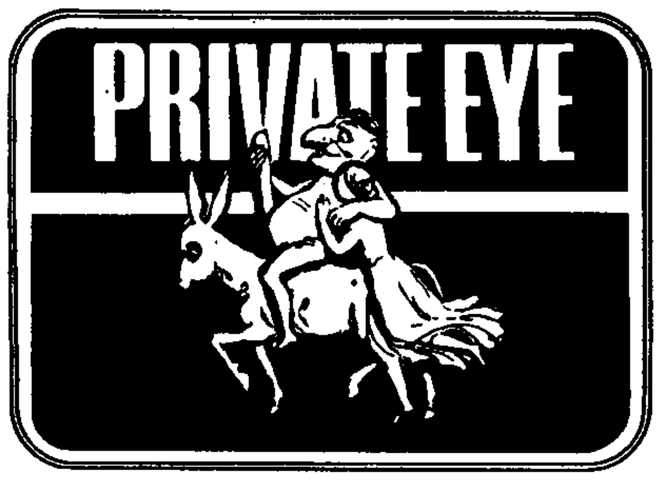

Read early, read often!

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- *From tearoom to boardroom: HP special on how the new government will work (or not)* **6, 7**
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WYRE, OH WYRE

THE best election result by far was at Wyre Forest, where the ambitious junior minister at the lord chancellor's department, barrister David Lock (10,857 votes), was hammered out of sight by the Health Concern candidate, Richard Taylor (28,487 votes).

Richard Taylor

The *Eye* was one of the first to appreciate the challenge from Health Concern. Under the heading *Wyres Crossed* way back in June last year, we traced the circuitous record of David Lock over the key local issue of the proposed closure of all acute services at Kidderminster Hospital (*Eye* 1007). Lock was against the proposals when he stood for the seat and won it unexpectedly in 1997. But his enthusiasm for the campaign against closure waned as he climbed into the government.

His ire was directed against those who opposed plans for the new hospital, especially Professor Allyson Pollock of the University College of London's school of public policy. Mr Lock complained not to Prof Pollock herself but to the chairman of the University College council, Lord Young of Graffham.

The *Eye* article drew a mocking reply from the MP who proclaimed himself a regular *Eye* reader and bitterly attacked Prof Pollock who, he wrote, "didn't bother to check her facts with the health authority before going to print". This letter drew a furious and devastating response from Richard Taylor, a retired consultant, whose letter (*Eye* 1007) exposed Mr Lock as, well, having been economical with the truth.

This was followed the following issue (1008) by a letter from Allyson Pollock pointing out that her facts about the hospital were quite correct. The cost of new PFI facility at Worcester replacing the services at Kidderminster had risen from £49m to £108m, and all to provide 44 percent fewer acute beds for more patients.

So besieged was Mr Lock by the campaigners for the hospital that he resorted to his lawyers. *Eye* 1023 reported that he had threatened to sue Frank Baillie, a vice-chairman of Health Concern, for telling the left-wing weekly *Tribune* that Lock "had gone for promotion instead of standing side by side with the people of Wyre Forest". Lawyers for the local authority (where Health Concern was and is the largest party) told Mr Baillie that they would not meet the costs of a libel action, and Baillie was forced to issue a grovelling and humiliating apology to Lock for saying something that was demonstrably true.

Mr Lock had not finished yet and his next assault on his critics won him the much-coveted spot of Man In The Eye (1026). He had rung a small publisher of a local magazine called *For You* who had had the nerve to re-print the *Eye*'s reports of the above events and as usual threatened them with a libel writ and demanded an apology and substantial damages. He objected in particular to the observation: "It is a racing certainty that an Independent MP who will truly represent the wishes of the people will be elected." Somehow the litigious MP did not get his apology or his damages before the election, when the magazine's prediction came so handsomely true.

There is talk up in Kidderminster of a mass phone-in to the former MP demanding an apology and even substantial damages for contesting the now rather obvious fact that the enormous majority of his constituents did not agree with him.

THE shape of Tony Blair's new government and his statements in the election campaign suggest that the private finance initiative (PFI), so dramatically rejected in Kidderminster, will form a major part of the government's proposed new blitz on hospitals and schools, and that Prof Allyson Pollock and her department will come under increasing attack from PFI-blinded ministers.

Chief among these is the old (and new) secretary of state for health, Alan Milburn. In a *Channel Four News* discussion during the election campaign, newscaster Jon Snow dared to suggest that building hospitals and schools by PFI was "mortgaging our children's future". Milburn exploded in fury, denouncing Snow for accepting at face value the view of "third-rate, leftish academics".

Though he has a degree from Lancaster University, no one could describe Mr Milburn as an academic. His background, especially his job as minder of the Days of Hope bookshop in Newcastle, is decidedly leftish, and "third-rate" is probably putting him rather high.

DESPITE the reams of newspaper and television coverage of events on the Labour battle bus, one memorable incident went unreported.

The hacks were bemused one afternoon when a portly Labour minder wandered down the bus and informed them: "The toilet is no longer accepting solids."

As one political reporter then piped up: "Even the bus isn't taking any more shit from Labour!"

Although the assembled hacks split their sides laughing at this joke, none dared include it in their daily diaries lest a piece of toilet humour at the expense of the government should lead to their exclusion from the all-important bus.

PRINCE PHILIP AT 80

Street Of Shame

"ROYAL Ascot is about as likely to take place this June as my Aunt Fanny's betrothal to the Prince of Wales," Nigel Dumpster revealed on 2 April this year. "The loss of Royal Ascot... will be a major financial blow to the Crown Estate."

Alas! When Royal Ascot opens as scheduled, will poor Dumpster doff his topper and morning suit, having suffered the humiliation of yet another "major blow"? Or will he be too busy writing letters of congratulation to his aunt and her new *fiancé*?

IN APRIL the *Financial Times* published a grovelling correction over an entirely fabricated article that was planted in the paper in order to manipulate the Energis share price. Although the hoaxer had tried the scam on nearly every paper in Fleet Street, only the *FT* fell for it.

But then the paper is so reliant on PR handouts and spin now that it has given up any pretence at serious journalism. Take the experience of portly hack Dominic Prince, who was recently commissioned by the *FT*'s Saturday magazine to write a feature about the multi-millionaire partners in investment bank Goldman Sachs. He was to co-author the piece with rich list guru Philip Beresford.

Prince rang the bank with requests for interviews. The calls were not returned – except once, when a PR man called Simon Eaton rang to tell Prince that the bank had a close relationship with the "pink un" and particularly with its editor, Richard "Safe Hands" Lambert. Soon after this conversation Prince received a call from Julia Cuthbertson, the *FT*'s weekend editor. "Forget it. Do not do the Goldman Sachs story. Someone from the bank has phoned someone on the paper."

Prince, who also writes a weekly column for Scottish paper *Business A.M.*, decided to tell his Caledonian readers about the *FT*'s display of fearless independence. Lambert hit the roof and rang *Business A.M.* editor John Penman, insisting that the decision to abort the story had nothing to do with Goldman Sachs.

So, er, why *did* the *FT* lose its nerve? Despite all his huffing and puffing, the ludicrous Lambert seems curiously reluctant to answer. Clearly, however, it would be absurd to suggest that the bank is allowed to treat the *Financial Times* as a bulletin board for its PR handouts – or that Lambert's friendship with Goldman partner and "new" Labourite Gavyn Davies had some influence on the story that never was.

WHEN Richard Desmond took over Express newspapers there was one part of the deal with Lord Hollick which stuck in the porn baron's craw. Although Dirty Des was now king of a national newspaper empire he still had to pay Hollick exorbitant rent for use of three floors of the Grey Lubyanka, home of the Express titles.

The perma-tanned mogul is now determined to cut back on this waste of his cash and wants to cram his porn mags, *OK!* magazine, the *Daily Star* and the *Sunday Express* into two floors of the Blackfriars Road building. Predictably this has led to chaos and – if it were possible – even higher levels of discontent as all the hacks and production staff find themselves squashed into unfeasibly small working areas.

When one claustrophobic feature writer asked health and safety about the legality of the new hemmed-in desk arrangements he was told that they were indeed legal – although only just. The new floor plans give each employee a generous 10 centimetres more than the minimum space legally required for office workers under EU regulations.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"On tap at the Millbank Party will be Piat d'Or, not champagne. 'The work goes on' will be the puritan toast."

— Patrick Wintour, *Grauniad*, 8 June, page 7

"Millbank had been declared 'dry' during the month-long battle but last night corks popped as bottles of bubbly were opened."

— Kevin Maguire, *Grauniad*, 8 June, page 7

"And where have you been?"

LAST Saturday the *Daily Telegraph*'s Peterbore column revealed gleefully that Massow Financial Services – run by gay, fox-hunting ex-Tory Ivan Massow – recorded a pre-tax loss of £465,000 in its latest accounts.

The company's debts now stand at £1.3m, and Ivan has been forced to cut his own salary from £387,000 to a mere £245,000.

This will no doubt come as heartening news to the many *Torygraph* fans who regularly check the "money matters" column in the Saturday edition, where an expert advises readers on their financial problems. Who is this bestower of oracular wisdom? Step forward, er, Ivan Massow.

NEW MEDIA, NEW COCK-UPS

"Hours after Tony Blair swept to a historic second term with a huge majority, he emerged from Tory central office to say that the party needed the chance to elect someone who could build on his work over the past four years..."

— Electronic *Telegraph*, 8 June

"A calm and composted Mr Hague thanked Conservative voters, candidates, workers and his wife Ffion."

— MSN news, 8 June

SIR Herbert Gussett and other *Daily Telegraph* readers who suspect that the world wide web is a satanic stew of filth have always assumed that at least the *Torygraph*'s own website was an oasis of purity, fit for any maiden aunt.

Not any more. Last Wednesday, the online *Torygraph* carried Nigel Farndale's lengthy interview with Richard Littlejohn, which had first appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* magazine. But whereas the magazine tastefully blanked out Littlejohn's expletives, the website version was sent out wholly unedited. Samples of Littlejohn's gorblimey wisdom included: "I don't hate Bernie Grant because he is a black, I hate him because he is a cunt... I don't want [racists] reading my column. They can fuck right off... I'm expecting [my novel] to be slaughtered by lots of people who probably won't read it. But who gives a fuck?... You flick through *Who's Who* and see some of the people who are listed in it and you think a better title for the book would be *Who Gives a Fuck?* There's a good ending for your piece."

The article duly ended there.

ELECTION O·B·N·K

"Tony Blair is the person who comes closest to political perfection and the political ideal among everyone I've ever met... and believe me I've been around politicians since my earliest childhood... The only negative point I can see is that he exercises such an attraction on people that they think he can work miracles."

PETER MANDELSON
Figaro magazine

"William has had a really magnificent campaign. He's led from the front, his energy has been absolutely boundless, he has been setting the agenda every day. It has been the most harmonious event, election or any other event, that I remember in modern politics and we are all just really very privileged to participate."

MICHAEL PORTILLO
The Mirror

"To secure two successive landslides of such crushing magnitude is a feat unmatched by any Prime Minister of modern times. Awesome, mammoth, vast – each adjective I reach for does not do justice to the scale of what he has pulled off. I get to the word epic – and yet even that seems too miserly a description of Tony Blair's achievement."

ANDREW RAWNSLEY
Observer

CLAIRE Petulengro, the *Express* astrologer, was brought in as a cheap replacement for Jonathan Cainer when he defected from Richard Desmond's paper to the *Mirror*.

So far she is certainly proving her worth.

When Madame Petulengro delivered a recent column, sub-editors were bewildered to note that in her birthday list of people "Celebrating on this day" the astrologer had included John F Kennedy.

Does the mystic Petulengro know something we don't?

AD NAUSEAM

WHILE Labour apparatchiks quaff champagne ordered four years ago and Tory infighting continues as if nothing had happened, some poor lag spent his weekend peeling off posters from every hoarding, building and siding. If one good thing has come out of this election, it may be the end of political advertising – or at least the end of the fallacy that it serves any purpose.

Repeated studies over the course of the campaign said that a total of £42m of posters were ignored by 90 percent of the electorate. With luck, next time around politicians might concede that the public do have a brain and that people with brains need more than a slogan to convince them.

THE most joyous news of the entire campaign came last week with the announcement that Peter Mandelson, advertising guru and sometime politician, is to return to his vocation with a consultancy role at a new advertising agency.

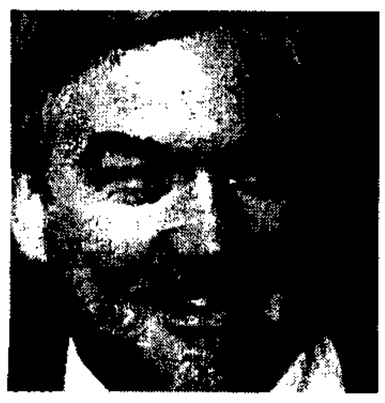
A man who could turn Neil Kinnock into Tony Blair clearly has a lot to offer any duff brand, and it just so happens that the new agency is being founded by one of his mates, ex-TBWA MD Johnny Hornby, who is the brother-in-law of novelist Robert Harris – Mandelson's only friend throughout the Hinduja farce. How ironic that Mandelson should be the first example of his own sorry legacy: that politics and marketing are now the same thing.

MAN IN THE EYE

CONRAD BLACK

"I wouldn't give up my Canadian citizenship for a particular status in another country," Conrad Black once said. "It's quite important to me."

Not any more, apparently. In a magnificent display of petulance and vanity, the proprietor of the *Telegraph* and *Spectator* has turned his back on Canada so that he can join such eminent personages as Lord Ashcroft of Belize and Lord Archer of Weston-Super-Mare in the House of Lords. This follows a ruling by the Ontario court of appeal last month that the decision by Canadian prime minister Jean Chretien to block Black's peerage could not be altered by the courts.



The saga began in 1999 when William Hague nominated the pompous media tycoon for a peerage. Since Black was "a Canadian citizen ordinarily residing in England" at the time, Downing Street asked the Canadian government if there was any legal impediment. Tony Blair then reported back to Black that as long as he became a British citizen as well and didn't use his title in Canada there would be no objections.

What happened next is described in the Ontario court ruling. "The Canadian government confirmed prime minister Blair's advice in a letter to the British government dated 9 June 1999... Relying on this advice, Mr Black immediately applied for, and on 11 June 1999 obtained, British citizenship. On 14 June, prime minister Blair wrote Mr Black confirming that his nomination as a peer was being forwarded to the Queen. Mr Black was told that his appointment would be made on 18 June 1999."

Two days to get a passport! It makes the Hinduja brothers look like sluggards. One trusts that the *Torygraph* will bear this in mind the next time it's tempted to accuse Labour of persecuting the "forces of conservatism".

Alas, however. On 17 June, the very eve of Conrad's big day, Chretien intervened to spoil it. He dug out an old parliamentary resolution from 1919 which had requested the king not to confer titles on any of his Canadian subjects. Black's appointment was suspended – thus causing him, as he complained in his legal challenge, "considerable public embarrassment and inconvenience". As well as demanding that the decision be overturned, he sought damages of $25,000 to compensate for his terrible suffering. Poor little diddums.

Worse was to come, however: the Ontario judges have now decided that advice by the Canadian prime minister to the Queen can't be reviewed by the courts. They have also ordered Black to pay all the costs of the case. Conrad was left with a simple choice: he could either be a Canadian citizen or be a member of the House of Lords. He chose the latter. As the *Ottawa Citizen* commented, "there's no accounting for taste". Another Canadian paper said that Black was "reminiscent of a kid picking up his marbles and going home when he doesn't get his way".

It may turn out to be an expensive fit of pique. Black's renunciation means that Canada's *National Post* – in which he has a 50 per cent stake – is no longer eligible for tax concessions granted to Canadian-owned businesses.

And will he get the bauble which caused him such grief and expense? Black's peerage was not officially "gazetted", so he now has to go back to square one and persuade the Tories to nominate him all over again. Given the large queue of superannuated Conservatives currently waiting for admission to the Upper House, it could be a long wait. Still, since the *Daily Telegraph* was the only national daily to back the Tories in the general election, no doubt William Hague will do the decent thing.

HACKWATCH

Those Experts In Full

"LABOUR certainly cannot assume another landslide Commons majority... My hunch remains that Labour's majority will fall, to perhaps 50 to 80." — Peter Riddell, the *Times*, 11 January 2001.

"We are a small club. At the moment our members are Mr Frank Johnson of the Daily Telegraph, Lord Rees-Mogg of the Times, Dr John Curtice of the University of Strathclyde and myself of this parish. Though small, we are not exclusive. Anyone can join, if he or she possesses the necessary qualifications. In fact there is only one criterion: the belief that, come the election, Mr Tony Blair is in for a nasty shock... I would define a nasty shock, in the present circumstances, as any Labour majority of fewer than 30." — Alan Watkins, *Independent on Sunday*, 14 January.

"Mr Blair could yet suffer from a mood of public cynicism which his over-spinning has done so much to create. For Mr Hague, however, cynicism is not enough. He has to persuade the British people that he is a potential prime minister. There is little time left for such a formidable undertaking; indeed many Tories are already convinced that Mr Hague has squandered his opportunities. But he still has just enough weeks to prove them wrong." — Bruce Anderson, *Mail on Sunday*, 14 January.

"Mr Hague can now convince voters that there is a real difference between the two parties... Mr Mandelson's departure may not be sufficient in and of itself to blacken the name of this government. But he has used up their remaining electoral lives. If there are any more scandals involving ministers between now and the general election, it would look very bad indeed... Stuart Wheeler's £5 million bet on Mr Hague is beginning to look increasingly astute." — Alice Thomson, *Daily Telegraph*, 26 January.

"Here is a shocking suggestion: William Hague can win... During a general election, when the institutionally anti-Tory BBC is for once restrained by law from its normal outrageous bias, he has a perfect opportunity to make his case direct to everyone... This has been done before by the most successful peacetime Conservative prime minister in history, who won election after election in the face of the patronising sneers of the liberal elite about her accent, her hair and about how she could never win." — Peter Hitchens, *Mail on Sunday*, 25 February.

"To judge by the polls, Mr Blair has an unassailable lead; all those who voted for him last time seem content to renew his mandate. But that does not reflect the mood of the country... When Mr Hague assures them that he is 'not embarrassed to articulate the instincts of the British people' he will strike a chord... A lot of decent, plain-speaking people will find their anxieties about their country reflected in [his] words. Mr Hague still has two months to persuade them to address those anxieties by bringing him and Ffion home to Downing Street." — Bruce Anderson, *Daily Mail*, 5 March.

"I think it likely that the Liberal Democrats will lose Somerton and Frome, where their majority in 1997 was only 130, with a Referendum Party vote of 2,449. The Lib Dems were seen in Somerset as the independent champions of rural interests when the Conservatives were in power. They are now seen as little better than Labour lobby fodder." — William Rees-Mogg, the *Times*, 5 March. (The Lib Dems held Somerton and Frome.)

"Robin Cook has won his battle to save his job after the election – smashing Jack Straw's hopes of becoming Foreign Secretary. Mr Cook has impressed Premier Tony Blair for two years with his behind-the-scenes negotiating skills. And the PM believes it is vital the Foreign Secretary is well-established on the international stage and known to key rivals... Home Secretary Mr Straw will either become Education Secretary or head a new ministry of Transport and Environment in a post-election shuffle." — "Exclusive" by George Pascoe-Watson, the *Sun*, 2 April.

"It looks as if the Liberal Democrats are in for a distinctly sticky election... [They] will be lucky to hold on to the ground they gained last time. That will be especially true in the West Country... It would be a miracle, for example, if Torbay did not revert to the Tories in eight weeks' time." — Anthony Howard, the *Times*, 10 April. (Torbay remained Lib Dem, with a vastly increased majority.)

"The Conservatives are unlikely to suffer net losses, but they may only reach 200, taking 30 or so marginal seats from Labour and perhaps five from the Lib Dems." — William Rees-Mogg, the *Times*, 7 May. (In fact the Tories "only reached" 166.)

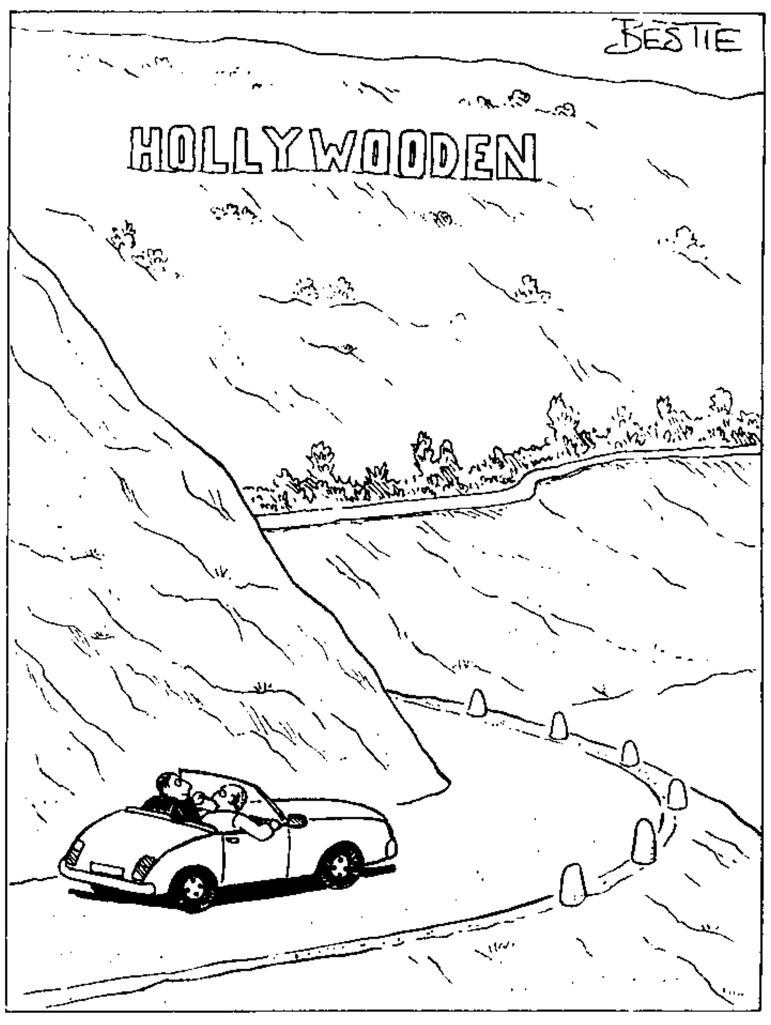
"On Saturday evening, William Hague was in buoyant spirits. I am less well-informed about the atmospheres in the Blair and Brown households, but I suspect that they were much less euphoric than the polls would seem to justify... There are signs that a significant number of voters are coming to realise that Mr Blair is patronising them. If that mood grows, the PM could rapidly find himself in trouble." — Bruce Anderson, *Independent*, 14 May.

"Mr [Martin] Bell, no slouch at reporting, is confident that he will come very close and suspects that he might win. Others in the Bell camp believe that he could trample Mr Pickles by 5,000 votes. I predict a Bell victory by 3,000 votes." — John Sweeney, *Independent*, 5 June. (Bell lost by 2,800 votes.)

"Trade Secretary Stephen Byers is set to stay put... Home Secretary Jack Straw is heading for the reshaped Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions... Robin Cook will remain Foreign Secretary." — Alison Little, *Daily Express*, 8 June.

"Tony Blair swept straight into the business of governing by finalising his second-term Cabinet team yesterday. Gordon Brown remains Chancellor... Robin Cook remains Foreign Secretary." — Alison Little, *Daily Express* first edition, 9 June.

"Within hours of sweeping back into Number 10 with an historic second election landslide, Tony Blair fired the starting gun last night for a radical five years with a massive reshuffle of his top team which saw Robin Cook dramatically demoted." — Alison Little, *Daily Express* final edition, 9 June.



"So is it true that the standard of movie actors has fallen?"

IN THE TEAROOM

Gordon vs. Tony

FOR six months before the election everyone in Number 10 was warned not on any account to upset the chancellor – on pain of banishment.

Indeed, orders had come down right from the top to tread as if upon eggshells round Gordon Brown's zones of acute sensitivity. But now the arrogant crew casually take him for an idiot and laugh like billy-o behind his back.

It has not escaped Gordon's notice that Tony Blair's closest lieutenants lost no time putting it about that it was the chancellor who demanded Robin Cook's sacking. For sure the pesky trio of Mandelson, Byers and Cook ritually taking turns to stick pins in his backside over the euro had long riled him. But Jonathan Powell had more direct influence over the foreign secretary's fate than ever Brown did.

Now the chancellor has to watch out whenever the resentful new leader of the House is at large. He's also spotted that Charles Clarke has been appointed with a specific brief to untangle the complex web of personal loyalties Brown has spent four years developing with the Labour party apparatus – at considerable cost in white wine – at his regular informal soirées at Number 11.

The hooligans next door would also dearly love to demolish his carefully constructed power base in the unions too; but the Blairites just can't recruit anyone with the political purchase with the firefighters, boilermakers and footplatemen to do it.

Being nobody's fool, the canny Scot has also sussed what John Prescott and Gus Macdonald are about: replacing his treasury narks in all the spending departments with cabinet office narks of their own. Nor is the significance of the appointment of the PM's favourite Pat Hewitt at trade and industry entirely lost on him.

During the election Brown had to sit quietly by while Blair took all the credit for his successful economy. Now he's had to suffer public humiliation just to keep his mate Nick Brown in some sort of a job. Do these people really think they can get away with it? Have they any idea the price they're going to be made to pay? Who do they imagine their next boss is going to be... David Blunkett? *Puh-lease!*

If that Tony Blair thinks he's going to get Britain into the euro without signing a contract (in blood) to hand over the premiership to Mr G. Brown at – or very soon after – the next election, he has another think coming.

'Urquhart'

"We can't agree on why we lost"

THE new cabinet line-up is not so much Blairite as Kinnockite, the new trade and industry secretary Patricia Hewitt being a case in point.

As a dungareed feminist activist, she once shared an office with Harriet Harman at the National Council for Civil Liberties. Keenly eyeing the crystal ball even then, Hewitt and Harman agreed that in the event of their respective partners popping their clogs, they would move into a house together and name it "Wits' End". Appropriately the wild-eyed Hewitt drove the defeated Labour prime minister James Callaghan to his wits' end, with an embittered Labour party conference speech denunciating the miserable record of his "reformist" administration as the party contemplated its navel in the early 1980s.

During the 1983 Labour leadership election, the diligent Hewitt fired off letters to both contestants, Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley, offering both her not inconsiderable services. For by this time Hewitt had moved with the times and wished to be associated with the "soft Left", rather than with her hairy-backed comrades of only a few years back.

After a stint as Neil Kinnock's policy director, Hewitt went off to make her fortune as a research director for Arthur Andersen, the consultancy that helpfully loaned staff as "key campaigners" to Labour's Millbank HQ during the 1997 general election campaign. She was parachuted into the safe Leicester West constituency as sitting MP Greville Janner helpfully announced his retirement shortly before the 1997 election.

The now thoroughly "new" Labour Hewitt is regarded by civil servants as a "hard minister" to work with and rude with it. Already union bosses are watching her progress with a sense of deep foreboding. For Hewitt is likely to be even more eager to please the Dear Leader than her predecessor, Stephen Byers. Any hopes that the union bosses may entertain that Hewitt's enthusiasm for the single currency might be matched by her wish to "converge" with the rest of Europe over "rights at work", are likely to be savagely dashed.

Meanwhile John Prescott's nemesis takes the shape of the not quite so hairy Charles Clarke – a former chief of staff to Neil Kinnock and an old friend of Peter Mandelson. Clarke has been promoted as party chairman, a Cabinet position with his salary being paid out of members' subscriptions.

Once upon a time as Kinnock's right hand man, Clarke would touchingly prevent Kinnock from seeing the more abusive letters that had arrived in the leader of the opposition's office. Clarke operated under the simple maxim of "never putting down on paper anything that might later be regretted"; advice that he might usefully have imparted to his old mucker Mandy, as the latter got himself into scrapes with building societies (over the Geoffrey Robinson loan) and Brazilian witch doctors (over his wish to have his tormentor Charlie Whelan vanish in smoke).

The wily Clarke long ago transferred his affection form the Welsh windbag to the Dear Leader. As such he is no friend of Gordon Brown. But then, in Tony's new look cabinet, *no one* is a friend of Gordon.

SHAUN "No Friends" Woodward does have one friend at least on whose shoulder he can cry when he returns to Westminster as the "new" Labour MP for St Helens South: step forward tattooed Ealing North MP Steve Pound.

Pound, who before parliament rose for the election could frequently be seen offering emotional support while accepting ciggies from the near chain-smoking Woodward in the tea room, had an eventful election campaign himself.

He was the candidate of course who was caught swearing at a member of the public, accusing them of being "a middle class tosser" for complaining about tuition fees. Presumably Pound prefers upper-class tossers, with their own butlers...

DEMOCRACY works in mysterious ways – especially in Scunthorpe, where Labour's Elliot Morley held his seat with a majority of more than 14,000. Without wishing to diminish his achievement, it is hardly surprising when you consider his opponents.

Scunthorpe's Liberal Democrat candidate Bob Tress didn't make a final statement in election week because, his agent said, he had gone on holiday. Sure enough when election night came there was no sign of Mr Tress.

The UK Independence Party candidate fared little better. He forgot to put a description of his party on the ballot paper, so nobody knew who he was representing. When he arrived at the count and noticed his tiny pile of votes, he hastily departed.

Finally there was an Independent candidate, David Patterson, who arrived at the count only to inquire how quickly it would be over because he wanted to leave early. As the count continued he gave up and disappeared home to bed.

When the votes were counted and the people of Scunthorpe's voice was finally heard, only Mr Morley and his Conservative rival Bernard Theobald were there to hear it.

ONE of the lowest turnouts in the country was in the safe Labour seat of Stalybridge and Hyde where James Purnell was elected with a majority slashed from 14,806 to 8,566.

Readers will know Purnell is a Blair toady of long-standing. Purnell went to work directly for Blair when he was only 19, and has effectively worked for him ever since. He was one of three Islington councillors who invented a load of smears against Liz Davies (*Eyes passim*). They were later forced to withdraw the smears and apologise for them, but not before they had had their desired effect: removal of Davies as Labour candidate for Leeds North East.

Purnell has been looking for a safe Labour seat for ages, and was eventually parachuted in, Sean Woodward-style, at Stalybridge and Hyde when Tom Pendry, the former Labour MP, decided to step down. Pendry's chief interest is sport, so watch out for his appointment to some convenient sports quango in the near future. The prime minister always favours his young toadies – and those who make way for them in the House of Commons.

ASSISTANT PRINCIPLE TEACHER

Kirkland High School & Community College, Methil

Fife Council advertisement

A RARE sighting of City of Durham's low profile but choleric Labour MP Gerry Steinberg last week, dispensing tea from the Women's Royal Volunteer Service stall at the local Dryburn hospital in the dying days of the election campaign.

Locals were heartened to see Steinberg giving such practical support to the charitable ladies of the WRVS, for they are soon to transfer to the new £97m privately-financed University Hospital next door. The concepts of charity and service upon which the WRVS is founded seem to be alien to Consort Health Care, the consortium of Balfour Beatty and the Royal Bank of Scotland which built the new hospital for the NHS.

The WRVS volunteers raise more than £100,000 a year for hospital equipment at Dryburn by running a shop, café and tea stall. In the hard-nosed world of privately financed health care, however, Consort will charge the WRVS commercial rents when they move to the new hospital in August. Patients already there pay £25 a week to watch TV and 50p a unit for phone calls – including incoming ones. When Steinberg and health secretary Alan Milburn toured the new hospital earlier this year they were challenged about the £3.50-a-day TV charges.

Milburn said: "Patients have a choice about whether they want to watch televisions installed in their rooms. This is what the NHS is about – giving people a choice."

Tea, anyone?

HOW THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL WORK

TONY BLAIR and Gordon Brown are in two minds: should they privatise the entire delivery of public services or just some of it? To help them decide they are consulting the best minds money can buy.

For a start, Downing Street has a report from the Blairite Institute for Public Policy Research. It recommends that private firms deliver health and education on the widest possible scale. The report, a final paper from the IPPR's "Commission on Public Private Partnerships", claims that "the crucial ingredient that the private sector possesses and the public sector needs is management".

The report was paid for by the Serco "institute", a front for the firm which privately runs a slew of Britain's prisons and immigration detention centres, including the grim "Doncatraz" Doncaster gaol. Serco failed to win the air traffic control privatisation precisely because of worries about its management.

The report was also supported by Nomura, a Japanese bank with a big interest in private finance initiative-style (PFI) deals. Nomura's management of army housing under PFI has been lamentable. KPMG chipped in to support the report as well. It is not a disinterested party either. KPMG advised on 29 hospital PFI schemes, and many other deals outside health.

The giant accountant's role in these hospital sell-offs has only come under independent scrutiny once: at Dartford and Gravesham hospital. The national audit office (NAO) found that, despite KPMG's "healthcare" advice, the new hospital probably made no financial saving but did cut beds drastically. KPMG's own fees were originally tendered at £152,000. It finally billed the NHS for £960,000. For good measure, the Norwich Union, which also put millions into PFI, invested in the IPPR report too.

Martin Taylor, chancellor Brown's friend who used to run Barclays Bank, acted as "commissioner" in drawing up the IPPR's advice. He is perfectly suited to the job: as an adviser to Goldman Sachs he is in the pay of a multinational bank which wants to make a profit out of Britain's poor. Goldman Sachs is involved in PFI: it originally funded the PFI buy-out of all Britain's dole offices.

As the "honorary secretary" of the Bilderberg group, Taylor is also involved in the secretive corporate schmoozing of big name politicians (he signed up for Bilderberg originally alongside Peter Mandelson). And when he ran Barclays, he showed his "secret ingredient" was disastrous management. Under his stewardship the bank lost £250m gambling in Russian financial markets, and had to stump up £300m to bail out the absurd American "hedge fund", Long Term Capital Markets.

Eventually Taylor was ousted by a boardroom battle in November 1998 before he could cause more damage. Now he's decided to help the public sector.

The treasury meanwhile wants to take a second look at IPPR's predictions about the efficiency of privatisation. In particular chancellor Brown wants to test the idea that the private sector gets greater productivity out of employees through "re-skilling", "efficient shift systems and better motivation" – rather than low pay, poor conditions, long hours and casualisation.

To test the theory he will commission a study by the Office of Government Commerce. This office in turn also has a private manager: Peter Gershon, Britain's highest paid civil servant on £180,00 a year, plus performance benefits and a three-year contract.

He was formerly chief operating officer at British Aerospace. But far from being experts in efficiency, BAe is best at massive cost over runs, project failures and non-competitive tendering. The managers in charge of the Tornado, Bowman Radio and Type 45 destroyer programmes – all plagued with late delivery and technical problems – reported directly to Gershon.

TONY BLAIR and Jack Straw have crowed about how they have managed to clear the huge backlog of asylum seekers waiting to learn whether they will allowed into the country.

Indeed, the pile-up of those awaiting *initial* decisions has come down from a record 103,495 in January 2000 to an impressive 31,795 at the end of April this year, which are the latest figures available.

The only problem though is that the hapless asylum seekers are now jammed in the appeals process. Home office figures show that since January 2000, the back-log in appeals has swollen from 6,600 to... 62,245! Add that to the 31,795 awaiting an initial verdict and you get an overall backlog of 94,040 – er, which is 14,000 more than the 80,000 Labour inherited in 1997.

PRISON service bosses have been running around trying to gather evidence to counter a report which favours privatising just about everything in jails except the warders.

The report has been prepared by Jack Straw's best friend (and now Wembley Stadium tsar) Patrick Carter. In fact prison service bosses do not have to look very far to find evidence which damns jail privatisation. Within the home office itself lies another unpublished study which shows that the cost of housing an inmate under the mortage-it-forever private finance initiative is £48,000 a year – twice the price of housing one courtesy of the state.

THE government, pledged to improve hospitals and schools, already appears to have found a neat way to reduce further education class sizes – by employing Capita.

Crapita of course is the lacklustre private outfit that is finally set to lose its contract to administer housing benefit (HB) in the London borough of Lambeth (see *Eyes passim ad nauseam*) thanks to pisspoor performance.

Nevertheless the department for education and employment (DfEE) has just awarded it a seven-year, £100m contract which puts it in control of incentives to encourage 16 to 19 year olds to stay in further education. With Crapita at the helm, pupils will doubtless soon be bailing out of further education in droves, reducing class sizes at a stroke!

ONE of the first measures due to be passed by the caring new "new" Labour government could mean fewer essential services for children with special educational needs.

At present each local education authority (LEA) has a statutory duty to state exactly how much special needs provision each child will receive over a given period. This is set to change, however, when a redrafted code of practice on special education is laid before parliament, taking away this obligation to specify the amount of special educational provision and leaving the way open for major cost-cutting by LEAs.

David Blunkett, education secretary in the last administration, and his cronies have excused the new vague wording by stressing the importance of "flexibility" over precise quantification.

CONTINUING problems with the accuracy of information held on the controversial police national computer (PNC) means the government's launch of its new privatised criminal records bureau has once again been delayed.

And when it does finally launch – supposedly later this year – it will only be on a trial basis in certain areas.

The PNC is to be the source for Crapita's (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*) lucrative contract to issue new criminal record certificates for millions of job applicants around the country. Although originally designed to provide extra safeguards for children and vulnerable adults, it is anticipated that any employer will be able to demand a record check.

Plans by the lord chancellor's department to use the PNC to vet potential jurors have already been shelved because of fears that people with

Richard Bradford (UKIP)

Landowner (Weston Park), restaurateur, married father of four and seventh Earl of Bradford. *Lichfield Mercury*

serious records could end up sitting on a jury. Napo, the probation officers' union, found convicted murderers, rapists and arsonists were not recorded on the PNC and earlier this year the home affairs select committee found up to two-thirds of PNC data still contained mistakes.

ULSTER LATEST

THE fragrant Jenny McCartney may have mourned David Trimble's electoral performance in her *Sunday Telegraph* column, but the Ulster Unionist (UUP) leader was himself noticeably upbeat about at least one result – the defeat of her father Robert "Trust Bob" McCartney.

McCartney's North Down seat fell to the Ulster Unionist's Lady Sylvia Hermon, wife of former RUC chief constable Sir John Hermon.

Despite possessing a magnetic personality, McCartney had a troubled campaign repeatedly trading verbal blows with erstwhile colleagues, especially Trimble.

"What does a result for me say for David Trimble if he loses? He's finished," purred McCartney (who in the past rightly collected libel damages from the *Eye*, and others).

In reply, an ever subtle (and longwinded) Trimble told the *Irish Times* that "Bob is, of course, a person who is very concerned about his reputation and also about the printed word, so I think he will want to give very careful thought over the next few weeks about who he will want to select to write his political obituary after 7 June."

The eventual winner, Lady Sylvia, replaced an anti-Good Friday agreement candidate who'd originally been selected to contest the seat, but suddenly found himself suspended from the UUP for persistently mocking Trimble. Another would-be UUP MP ruled himself out of the selection meeting after one of his colleagues helpfully revealed that he'd fathered a child out of wedlock as recently as three decades ago.

Although McCartney's personal vote rose, the withdrawal of the Alliance party candidate allowed Hermon to gain a narrow victory. Bob's political career has therefore reached a premature end (although with all those damages behind him, and a lucrative stint at the bar, at least there's a nice home to retire to).

Coincidentally Lady Hermon also benefits from the wonderful world of libel. Her husband was able to splurge on the home decoration front thanks partly to another completely justified damages payment from the *Eye*.

And as to McCartney and Trimble's predictions for each other, they're both right... because they're both finished.

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Is under construction

Meccano Web site

TVE

The West Wing (Channel 4)
Vote 2001 (BBC1)
Election 2001 (ITV)
Politics Isn't Working (Channel 4)

SOME years ago, Channel 4 signalled its contempt for traditional telly Christmas schedules by commissioning Quentin Crisp to deliver a Queen's (ho ho) Xmas Message directly opposite Brenda's. Before 7 June, in a political equivalent of such subversion, C4 had deliberately double-banked some recent episodes of The West Wing so that the one in which Martin Sheen was shot would fall on British election night. Even as the Dimbelbys presided solemnly over the festival of democracy on the other main channels, Channel 4 viewers were offered the attempted assassination of a fictional politician.

This piece of mischief was highly significant. As other televisual values have collapsed one by one, probably the last consensus among executives was that general elections were to be taken with the utmost seriousness. By keeping his channel at home on voting day, C4 chief executive Michael Jackson broke the taboo and ensured himself at least a tricky five minutes in his future interview for director-general of the BBC, which sees itself as the recording angel of democracy in action.

Throughout the election campaign, Channel 4 had become the first British network to abandon in its poll coverage the tradition of journalistic even-handedness and the assumption of good faith towards the process and the candidates. Its discussions and documentaries under the *Politics Isn't Working* banner were an attempt to reflect the anger and apathy of much of the electorate.

It was a bold attempt to counter the switch-off factor which afflicts television politics but inevitably foundered on the same problem. If people are anti-politics, they won't necessarily watch anti-political programmes; they'll probably watch something entirely different. The ratings for Channel 4's sod-politics shows were no better than for anyone else's traditional electoral fodder.

But, for those who played it straight, this was the hardest election ever. Apart from the growing group of voters who weren't interested, viewers who were tended to assume that they knew the result in advance. Live coverage of democracy's Cup Final was always going to feel like watching the highlights of a football match when you've already heard the outcome on the radio.

With the older and better Dimbleby at the desk, the BBC overnight results show – this time called *Vote 2001* – has been established since Thatcherism as the model of political programmes. But, though as usual gaining the bulk of the viewers, the show had a mixed night. The feared disaster was avoided when the exit poll soon proved to be right. But going in with two main anchors in their sixties – Dimbers snr and Peter Snow – was always a risk and there were times after midnight when it felt like one all-nighter too many for them. Snow's other problem was that his big gizmo – a set of steps up which a virtual William Hague walked to show his notional progress towards Number 10 – was never employed because Hague failed even to reach the bottom step of the virtual ladder of ambition.

"You are the weakest link, goodbye"

In the end, though, election night result shows suffer from the publicity slickness of Sunderland. Unfortunately, the reason the city tends to declare first – its historic low turn-outs – makes it treacherous for psephology. This time, for example, BBC pundit Tony King advised viewers to look out for the vote of Labour candidate Chris Mullin. If he polled 21,000 votes or so, King opined, it would be a great night for Labour. Substantially less than that and there was cause for Hague to be optimistic. The returning officer revealed that Mullin had won 19,000 votes. Bad news for Labour, Dimbers suggested to King. Not necessarily, the Canadian pollster now said. Sunderland had notoriously low turn-outs and was probably unrepresentative.

Lounging with winning and losing politicians on a platform above Dimbers, Paxo reliably got in digs about Woodward's butler. But, just as great bowlers tend to be most dangerous in the early parts of their careers, so Paxo has become more entertaining than penetrating. The experienced political performers now simply ignore his sarcasm.

over on ITV's **Election 2001**, much was made of how quick they were being with the results. While true, this speed was sometimes achieved by putting speculation on air. What made it a difficult night for all the results shows was that all of the rumours of losers – Estelle Morris, Virginia Bottomley, Michael Ancram, Stephen Twigg – turned out to be false, often spectacularly so; while the rumours of interesting winners – Martin Bell, Malcolm Rifkind – were equally inaccurate.

The basic drawback with poll shows is that they get most interesting about three hours in, thus breaking the usual laws of audience-pulling. If television has its way, ballot-boxes will eventually be sealed and counted on Friday afternoon for a mid-evening results show. Politicians will also have to move towards shorter campaigns because, as Channel 4 and to a lesser extent ITV demonstrated this time, at a time of increased competition in television, networks are becoming less willing to bugger their ratings for a whole month.

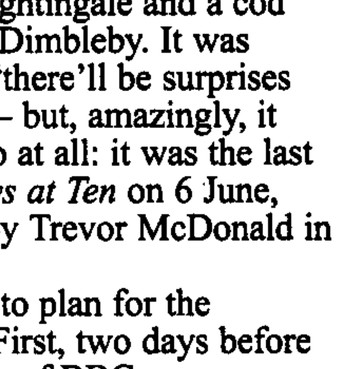
'Square Eyes'

DUMB BRITAIN

It's Not The Answer, ITV

Nadia Sawalha: Who in 1901 originated the quantum theory?
Contestant: Sir Isaac Newton.

This Morning, ITV



Fern Britton: If you're claustrophobic, what are you traditionally afraid of?
Contestant: Open spaces.

The Weakest Link, BBC

Anne Robinson: What "C" is a wine drunk on special occasions?
Contestant: Chardonnay.

MEDIA NEWS

WHEN BBC and ITV unveiled their plans for election night coverage, the rival channels made much of the fact that they would both feature women reporters more heavily than ever before.

Newspapers faithfully reported the telly line-ups of "BBC Babes" and "glamorous" ITN female reporters. ITV produced a particularly oily plug for its election "coverage", complete with totty shots of presenter Mary Nightingale and a cod "interview" with Jonathan Dimbleby. It was narrated by Nick Owen – "there'll be surprises and plenty of excitement" – but, amazingly, it wasn't a stand alone promo at all: it was the last "news" item on ITN's *News at Ten* on 6 June, cued into the programme by Trevor McDonald in the usual way.

Alas, things did not go to plan for the broadcasters on the night. First, two days before the election the grand dame of BBC correspondents Kate Adie unleashed a tirade of abuse at her BBC news bosses describing their output as "terrible, trivial and insulting". Would the chief news correspondent's harsh criticism lead an angry BBC to exclude her on election night? No, no, cried Auntie's newsmen. She was to report live from former chancellor Kenneth Clarke's constituency. "All our important news correspondents will cover important people," opined one BBC spin doctor.

So how much did the very "important" Adie feature during the BBC's many hours of programming? Not once.

Over on ITV the recently promoted Mary Nightingale was supposed to have a major role in the election coverage, but her on-screen appearances were as rare as Tory wins. Dermot Murnaghan and Jonathan Dimbleby were allowed to dominate studio proceedings on the night.

The BBC's Fiona Bruce fared little better. While Jeremy Paxman and David Dimbleby dealt with the major interviews, Fiona was left to elicit the views of specially brought in members of the public.

BETTER HOMES
THE CHEAPEST AND BEST WAY TO MAKE A BIG IMPROVEMENT...
IS TO TAKE OUT THE TV
SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WATCH CAROL VORDERMAN
Ken Pyne

IN THE past BBC political editor Andrew Marr has dealt with those who criticised his appointment by firing back at them in spades. But it seems the gentle atmosphere of the BBC is beginning to soften the jug-eared hack's defences.

When Andrew Neill took time off from the *Scotsman* to visit Labour party press conferences in London, lobby hacks were shocked to see him chatting amicably to Marr.

Neill had been one of the chief critics of the left-leaning Marr's appointment to the Beeb. In response, Marr had launched a vituperative attack on Brillo Pad describing him as a "St Tropez babe botherer" who "doesn't seem to be keen on anybody except that crater faced, old paranoiac in the shaving mirror."

So how had the sudden friendship come about? Marr told puzzled fellow hacks that although he believes in fighting his critics head on, his rows were "battles, not wars". Whatever next... a rapprochement with the *Daily Mail* or a love-in with Lord Tebbit?

GOING LIVE

SKY News's Rachel Amnet went live on 6 June to cover the arrest of "entertainer" Michael Barrymore. Like the other hacks in the scrum, she'd attended a pooled interview with Barrymore's solicitor.

"He wasn't able to tell us too much," she said, leaving the studio anchor to bombard her with scripted questions about what she, er, didn't know. How long had he been there? "He wasn't able to tell us how long Barrymore had been questioned." Had he denied the allegations? "He wasn't able to tell us." And so on.

JOHN BIRT's bi-media empire, in which news and current affairs reporters were expected to work for both radio and television, is quietly being dismantled, along with its disastrous £40m joint newsroom.

While there is some relief among over-stretched hacks, the sophisticated selection criteria used by Vin Ray, "Executive Editor News-gathering", is bruising a few egos at White City.

Peter Hunt, Jane Peel, Valerie Jones, Peter Gould and John Andrew – all of whom are deemed to be insufficiently telegenic – will be "primarily focused" (ie swept from our screens) and consigned to the wireless.

Meanwhile Robert Hall (who pioneered the extraordinary technique of prancing about while talking to camera) will move permanently to telly along with gorgeous, pouting Emma Simpson, dashing Duncan Kennedy and chisel-jawed George Eykyn. So much for the sophistication of 21st century newsgathering.

GREG DYKE's mission to remove the layers of bureaucracy inflicted on the BBC by John Birt has hit another snag with the arrival of a new financial computer system.

Called "SAP" it is supposed to centralise payments for everything from contracts for guest appearances to hire cars, research requests to equipment hire. Without a "SAP" number it's virtually impossible to do anything at the Beeb at all. Shame then that it is so complicated. Users have to attend two special training courses, "Summary Requisitions" and "Detailed Requisitions" to guide them through the 50 or so actions needed to process even the simplest tasks. Described by operators as "appalling", SAP is the reason so many contractors and guests must wait so long for payment.

Despite eight pages of "guidelines" for confused users, including the indispensable

O·B·N

Simon Mayo: If you ran the country, who would you put on the stamps?

Trevor Kavanagh (of the *Sun*): Rupert Murdoch. He's a hero of mine.

Radio Five Live

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

"Wave 1 – Apollo Radio – solution" and "Wave 1 – Apollo Television solution", a record backlog of artists' payments has built up, along with torrents of abuse from producers who find the programme numbers they have always used to book things suddenly been changed.

THE dispute between Channel 4 prankster Dom Joly and the London *Evening Standard*'s *ES* magazine promises to develop into a full-blown feud.

The last *Eye* reported that the *Trigger Happy TV* comedian resigned from his star column in the magazine after editor Mimi Spencer censored a section of his prose which attacked one of the *Standard*'s own TV critics, Lucy Etherington.

Spencer admonished Joly in a letter, saying: "One of the first rules of journalism is that you should never attack your own." Only a few weeks later La Spencer appears to have forgotten her own advice. In a recent article, Joly's *Trigger Happy TV* was witheringly described as "So Over".

A FASCINATING article by one of the *Guardian*'s resident Fenians, Roy Greenslade, brings readers "the latest twist in an eight-year saga". This is the appeal court's rejection of an attempt by the *Sunday Times* to overturn last year's jury verdict in favour of Channel 4 documentary-maker Sean McPhilemy.

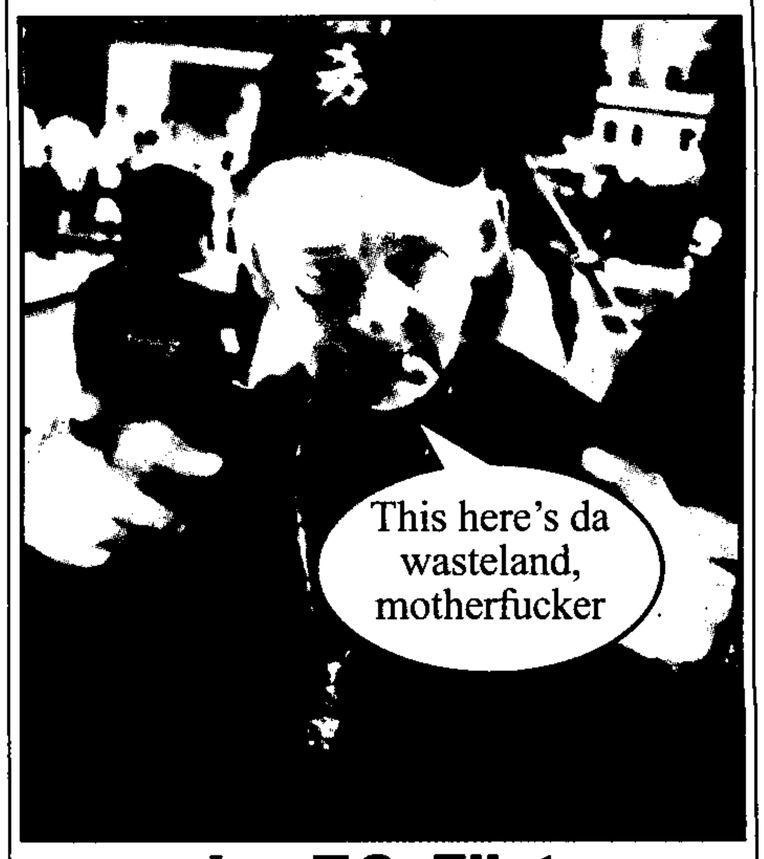
McPhilemy had sued the *ST* after it rubbished his claims that a secret society of top politicians and policeman, called the Committee, was directing loyalist death squads in Northern Ireland. Under the libel laws, the *Sunday Times* (as defendant) was obliged to prove that the Committee didn't exist – an impossible task. The jury duly awarded McPhilemy £145,000 damages.

Alas, Greenslime had no space to mention last year's settlement in the United States – where, rather than put up a defence, McPhilemy and his publishers paid out $1m in damages to two men whom he had wrongly accused of involvement in the Committee. Nor does he mention McPhilemy's allegation that the Committee assassinated lawyer Pat Finucane – a story disbelieved by almost everybody in Northern Ireland including the Finucane family, Sinn Fein, the RUC and the director of public prosecutions, all of whom blame former British army agent Brian Nelson and his associates.

Still, McPhilemy will soon have his day in court. When the *Eye* checked last week, no fewer

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



Ice T.S. Eliot

than 54 libel actions were currently pending in Belfast against McPhilemy and those who have repeated his claims. The plaintiffs include *Sunday Times* hack Liam Clarke and his former colleague Barrie Penrose, both of whom have clashed with the decidedly touchy McPhilemy. The defendants include amazon.co.uk and W.H. Smugg's internet division.

Because the positions are reversed from last year's case, this time it is McPhilemy who will have to go into the witness box and justify his allegations. The *Sunday Times* may have failed to prove that the Committee doesn't exist, but can he prove that it *does*? No doubt he will welcome the opportunity.

COURT CIRCULAR

FANS of the Spanish gossip press will have read all about the Prince of Wales's visit to the town of Villareal to celebrate the opening of a new factory by the Spanish ceramics firm, Porcelanosa.

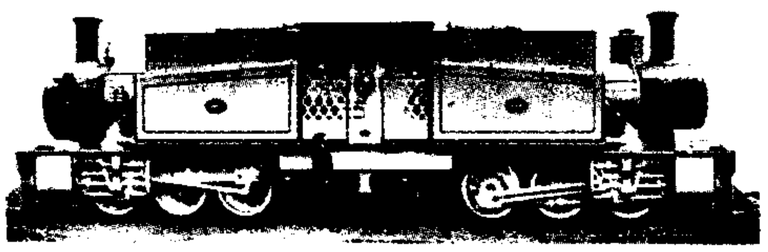
More than 500 guests joined "El Principe Carlos" at a dinner on 11 May, where he posed for photos with Sophia Loren and Isabel Preysler, the beautiful ex-Mrs Julio Iglesias who is the face of Porcelanosa.

Just a few days later, Prince Charles was once again snapped in the company of Ms Preysler, this time in The Carpet Garden which he designed for the Chelsea Flower Show. Lest Camilla worry about Ms Preysler's charms, she should note that not only did the Spanish company sponsor the Islamic art-inspired garden, transplanted to the prince's estate at Highgrove after the Chelsea show, but the fountain therein was built not by a British pottery, but by... Porcelanosa.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

SO WHO DID YOU VOTE FOR?
WELL....I LOOKED AT ALL THE OPTIONS AND VOTED FOR THE ONE THAT SUITS ME BEST!
..... THE RED ONE. I LOVE RED..... ...MOST OF MY OUTFITS ARE RED. WHAT'S THE RED ONE CALLED?
TORY I THINK!



SIGNAL FAILURES

Railtrack share price

JUST before the election, as Railtrack's share price was falling to a record low, Tony Blair was still rejecting renationalisation of Railtrack. How much more evidence does he need before he accepts that the current set-up is untenable and that he himself has a duty to intervene?

We predicted last October *(Eye 1013)* that the government would bail Railtrack out, however ghastly its performance. Then the Hatfield crash exposed the extent of Railtrack's incompetence – in return for which Railtrack got an extra £1.5bn from the government. But that hasn't fixed the problem: Railtrack still has a hole of almost £4bn to fill and it has lost the city's confidence.

Blair swept the filthy "r" word under the carpet by highlighting the public money and disruption involved in renationalisation – as if the current structure is free of both. Are we really to believe money is the main obstacle to solving the rail crisis for a government which threw vast sums of money at the foot-and-mouth crisis? The simple reality is that Blair and "new" Labour are too spineless to exert the necessary control over the railways because that involves accepting some of the responsibility when things go awry.

Absolutely freightful

THE biggest obstacle to "new" Labour's goal of switching significant amounts of freight from lorries to trains is… "new" Labour itself.

The government's strategic rail authority (SRA) earned its stripes for once when it produced a freight strategy last month. It said Labour's target of an 80 percent increase in rail freight by 2011 is achievable provided no more tax breaks are given to truckers.

It set out a clear programme of improvements so all players can work towards that goal. Alas, one of those players is the government. And while the SRA was drafting its freight strategy, the treasury agreed a raft of extra tax concessions for road hauliers.

The purpose of Labour's promised increase in rail freight is not to run more trains but to reduce the number of lorries causing pollution, accidents, congestion and wear-and-tear on the roads. Fewer lorries means fewer truck drivers and fewer haulage companies; but when hauliers complain about being forced out of work, the government steps in with more handouts to keep them on the road.

Moving Goalposts

"DELIVERING the world's best railway: Ten years from now, Britain will have a railway that is second to none – both in the quality of its infrastructure and in the dependability of its train service." — Railtrack network management statement, 1996.

"Railtrack's new chairman [John Robinson] has pledged to help Britain's rail network become 'world class' within 10 years." — Press Association, May 2001.

Virgin blushes

VIRGIN Trains chose Oxford station as the venue for Richard Branson to launch the new trains for cross-country services. A local person pointed out to Chris Green, chief executive of Virgin Trains, that Oxford was a bizarre choice because several of Virgin's cross-country services now pass through Oxford without stopping. "Oh shit," was Green's response.

'Dr B. Ching'

DOING THE ROUNDS

"NEW" Labour's pledge to save the NHS by closer cooperation with the private sector may have come just a tad too late.

Many doctors at the pre-election British Medical Association (BMA) conference admitted to having already taken out private medical insurance or paying for one-off private treatments because they don't believe the NHS can provide a decent, competent service for themselves or their families. And if it's not good enough for a doctor's kids, why should anyone else be lumbered with it?

Labour's inability to improve the NHS seems to have filtered through the country some time ago, with the number of people covered by private medical insurance rising by 5.5 percent in the year to 31 December 2000 to 6,877,000. This represents the highest annual rate of growth since 1990, with many companies opting to pay for their employees to be seen quickly rather than pay for them to be off sick for months waiting on the NHS.

This makes good sense for the economy but is particularly bad news for the NHS because a doctor can only be in one place at a time; and when you try to serve two masters, it's usually the one who pays the most who wins. "New" Labour has tried to stem the use of NHS-trained staff by the private sector by imposing a seven-year ban on new consultants doing private work. This should in theory be a blessing for patients because today's consultants qualify with far less experience than previously and need the close supervision and training of senior colleagues before branching out to a full repertoire of solo private practice.

Alas, if Labour forces through its plan, it is precisely these senior colleagues who will be picking up all the private work and will be even harder to locate on NHS premises in an emergency. Perhaps the safest solution is for private health insurers to contract operations out to NHS hospitals, rather than vice versa.

● COULD "new" Labour's abandonment of its traditional pre-election waiting list pledge have been triggered by prior knowledge of an impending national audit office (NAO) report?

Despite strenuous efforts to the contrary, the auditors have been "unable to verify the accuracy of waiting list figures or confirm the baseline figure used by the Labour Party to set its 1997 election pledge." Waiting lists have existed and been fiddled ever since 1948, but the huge pool of unmet need has meant that any attempt to reduce them has been both futile and meaningless. There are always more people out there to treat than the NHS can ever manage.

"New" Labour opted for a reduction of 100,000 which, even if it had been successful, just meant that those remaining on the list have had to wait longer. "New" Labour is now banking on "more nurses and doctors" to save the NHS. But will they be of sufficient quality? The BMA claims the crisis in academic medicine has lead to so many job vacancies there is no one left to teach tomorrow's doctors. And another NAO study has found a five-fold variation in trust spending on nurse training and a 10-fold variation in nurses' access to higher education. Oh, and one nurse in three in most trusts has not updated their skills in basic life support.

● MANY doctors believe the public inquiry into the Bristol heart surgery scandal should have predated the general medical council (GMC) inquiry, to allow a fuller understanding of the failings not just of two doctors and a manager, but at every level of the NHS.

However, the GMC went first to save its skin and the public inquiry has been so slow that now one of the surgeons, Mr Janardan Dhasmana, who was barred from carrying out child heart surgery three years ago by the GMC, is reapplying to have this restriction lifted without either party nor any of the bereaved parents having the benefit of the inquiry's findings as to how the tragedy arose in the first place. Health secretary Alan Milburn should just publish the damn thing.

M.D.

"Let me through! I'm your doctor"

DOWN ON THE FARM

A BLACK joke going round the farming community explains the mass-killing in Katmandu of most of the Nepalese royal family: "Those MAFF vets must have had another wrong map reference."

On top of all the other scandals surrounding the scarcely credible incompetence with which the Maffia has been perpetrating its mass-slaughter of more than 10 percent of Britain's livestock population (more than six million animals killed so far, and rising), the latest to emerge is the scale on which it has been managing to avoid paying its bills.

When one Wiltshire shepherd and trained slaughterman recently came back home for the sheep shearing season, after working eight weeks for the Maffia in Cumbria killing thousands of sheep without a single day off, he wondered why he had not received a penny in wages. He then learnt that dozens of his colleagues on this soul-destroying task had not been paid either.

Several who had worked in Cumbria for two weeks at the beginning of April had still not been paid six weeks after returning home. In Wales scores of farmers who lost all their livestock in March have also not yet received their promised compensation nearly three months later, even though many of their slaughtered animals were perfectly healthy.

Bob Parry, president of the Farmers' Union of Wales, has protested to the Welsh rural affairs minister that many farmers in Anglesey and elsewhere had lost all their animals in the "pre-emptive cull" in the early weeks of the epidemic. They were promised full compensation "within three weeks". By the end of May, when they had no other source of income and creditors were demanding payment for long overdue bills, there was still no sign of those cheques and the Maffia simply refused to give any indication when the money might be forthcoming.

● IT IS hardly surprising our Beloved Leader for Life has ruled out any possibility that he might eventually allow any inquiry into the foot-and-mouth catastrophe, along the lines of the 1969 Northumberland Report on the much lesser FMD outbreak of 1967/8.

It was one thing for the leader to spend £30m on the Phillips inquiry into the BSE disaster. By conveniently fixing its cut-off point at March 20 1996, this might suggest that such blunders only happen under a Tory government. But when an infinitely worse catastrophe takes place in the reign of the Beloved Leader, at an estimated cost so far to Britain's economy of £20bn, it would obviously not be in the national interest to allow any similar investigation, for fear it might have to conclude that the 2001 foot-and-mouth epidemic was the most flagrant example of government incompetence and dishonesty in history.

What a good thing we no longer have an opposition worthy of the name, because otherwise it might have been able to point this out.

'Even Newer Muckspreader'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

GEE SWIZZ

FOLLOWING the demise of Lambeth council's anti-fraud team (Caft), wound up in March (*Eye* 1023), the *Eye* has learnt that it spent taxpayers' money trying to dig up dirt on its critics.

Caft's former boss Jim Gee — now head of the multi-million pound counter-fraud directorate of the NHS — went to extraordinary lengths to snoop on fellow council officers. In 1997, rattled by criticism from Lambeth's then director of finance, Michael Crich, Gee paid private investigators Kroll Associates to conduct a clandestine "fishing expedition" to see if Crich — a man whose integrity had never been questioned — had any skeletons. He didn't.

Codenamed "Project Venetian", it looked at bank details, county court judgments, academic qualifications, mortgage arrangements, land registry details, salary, electoral roll and credit status.

Gee was informed by Kroll that Crich was in some way involved with Intuit Inc, a California-based "e-finance" company. Gee therefore sanctioned Kroll to set up "two pretext interviews with sources close to Intuit". These revealed that Crich was, er, not connected with Intuit — an entirely reputable company — in any way.

RACING CERT

DONCASTER'S fourth disgraced ex-leader in a row, Colin Wedd, arrested in April in connection with alleged expenses fiddles, has caused a commotion by remaining chairman of the council's racecourse committee.

Even in Doncaster arrested councillors normally face political purgatory; but Wedd has been let off because of "the need to utilise Cllr Wedd's racing expertise at a time when a major redevelopment of the council-owned racecourse is planned".

The £55m Town Moor development has the makings of a Wembley-style fiasco, with Wedd playing Ken Bates. The proposal is to upgrade the exhibition centre; build a posh hotel and new grandstand; replace the jockey accommodation; and demolish and relocate the bloodstock sales facility.

The racecourse committee is an arm's-length body, whose minutes have been protected from public scrutiny under Labour's "SO23" orders. Funding for this entirely irrelevant project is being sought from the £750m single regeneration budget money granted to South Yorkshire's deprived areas with the intention of regenerating the local economy by providing permanent well-paid jobs.

The upgrade will not achieve anything like that, but it is Wedd's pet project and he is being indulged by his mates. That's how Donny works.

● **SPECTACULAR double-standards in Lib-Dem Richmond-upon-Thames, where at least three council employees have been told to resign or be sacked after visiting porn sites on their council-supplied computers. A more lenient approach — a simple verbal reprimand and no public naming — is taken if the sleazy surfer is a former deputy mayor...**

MARKET FORCES

FLINTSHIRE county council officers' habit of forging documentation and lying to the Welsh office has been well-documented (*Eyes passim*), although both chief executive Phillip McGreevy and legal chief Andrew Loveridge escaped serious criticism in a recent district auditor's report.

Now the DA has been alerted to a strange episode when McGreevy was chief executive of the former Delyn borough council and Loveridge was chief solicitor of Clwyd county council.

In the early 90s Delyn established a Saturday market at Holywell on Deeside, for which it needed a pedestrianisation order from the county council to get rid of the traffic. Andrew Loveridge provided it, signing a 24-hour traffic order. This was unlawful because it required, but did not get, Welsh office approval. The Welsh office had been told, wrongly, by a member of Loveridge's legal department that it was only an eight-hour daytime order and therefore didn't need their consent. The locals, meanwhile, were told it had Welsh office approval. It hadn't.

In support of the council's market plan McGreevy's office produced a letter from Holywell chamber of commerce which stated that it was unanimously against any Saturday market other than the council's. This letter, which sank the hopes of a private rival, the Funship market, was a forgery. The chamber of commerce had never met to pass such a resolution. In fact the chamber was defunct at the time. A trifling impediment to Flintshire's can-do council officers!

● **WHEN Laing Homes applied to build 84 private homes in Isleworth, west London, Hounslow councillors said yes if the developer provided a much-needed medical centre for local GPs. However, senior planning officer Anil Khosla then took it upon himself mysteriously and secretly to rewrite the relevant "Section 106" agreement, so that the development could go ahead *without* the medical centre. When councillors found out they were furious. Though a scrutiny panel report last month firmly blamed Khosla, the assistant director of environmental services could not be disciplined. In April he had taken early retirement due to ill health and had left with a handsome pay-off. Happily Mr Khosla's health is not so bad it has prevented him taking a well-paid part-time job as a consultant to Mark Gilks, chief executive of Hounslow council.**

FAMILY VALUES

THINGS were going badly for the grandly-named "public realm strategy team" at Bath and North East Somerset Council (Banes).

Having spent £600,000 irritating the public with a partial pedestrianisation which turned the city's main shopping street into a building site for much of the past year, the team's senior officer Penelope Tollit needed some help. Step forward freelance "urban designer", Michael Tollit – who happens to be her husband. Mrs Tollit reports that his services are "ensuring that the project is now progressing well".

And when Susan Burt, the council's marketing executive for the hugely over-budget and behind-schedule Bath Spa project (*Eyes passim*), wanted a website to promote the white elephant, her partner Michael Northcott's company, Bluecheese Digital Media Ltd, was on hand to create one for a mere £4,000. Sadly, Bluecheese is now in liquidation.

● **SIMON PHILLIPS, who last week stood as an Independent candidate for Gloucestershire county council, wins this month's Always Look On The Bright Side award for election candidates. Days before the poll he pleaded guilty to two charges of assault against his wife Andrea. Cheltenham magistrates heard how he had punched and slapped her during a row over her hairdo. After the hearing Phillips, who will be sentenced this week, said: "I'm not a violent man. I don't think this will stop women voting for me. Getting elected will give me an outlet for my aggression." Alas, the voters did not agree.**

High Principals

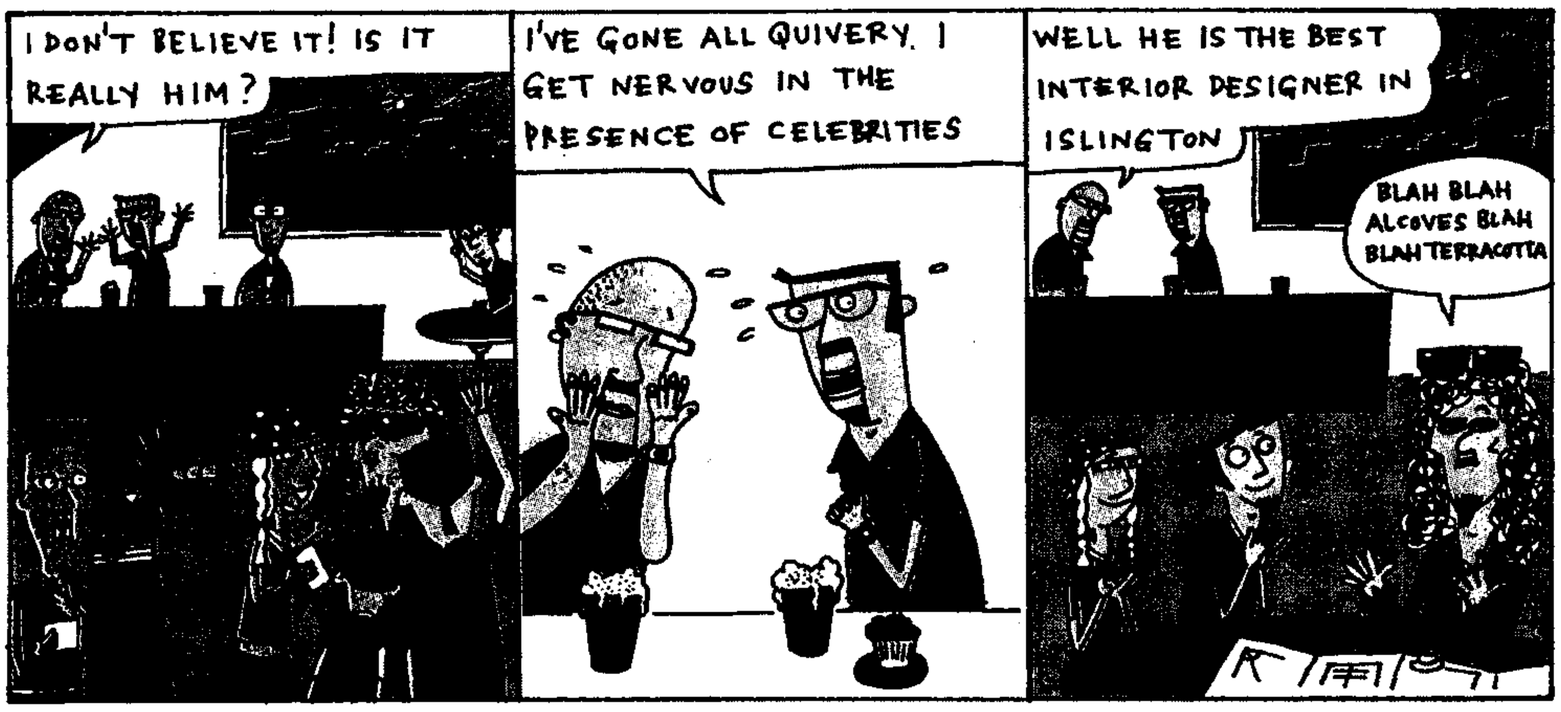
DESPITE a huge drop in student recruitment owing to the introduction of tuition fees by the last Labour parliament, new universities have fared remarkably well in recent league tables. Academic success, however, counts for little with the managers of these former polytechnics, who have decided that the future lies in "downsizing" the teaching of traditional subjects.

Luton University, for example, is scrapping all its humanities departments this summer and making between 50 and 60 lecturers redundant. The history department at Luton, which will be merged with the department of law in the autumn, was ranked 21st in the country by the *Guardian* league table of teaching standards published in May. The lack of open discussion within the university on the changes being wrought is demonstrated by an anonymous pamphlet which describes the events leading up to the history department's loss of independence, entitled "A Thoroughly Mismanaged Affair". Copies of this leaflet were posted from outside the university to every member of the board of governors, but in the interest of free speech the vice chancellor, Dai John, decided to intercept and withhold this private correspondence from the addressees so long as the authors remained anonymous. Only after the pamphlets were posted a second time by recorded delivery, accompanied by a warning that a formal complaint would be made to the Royal Mail if they were not delivered, did John permit them to reach the governors.

At another new university, Nottingham Trent, meanwhile, talks are underway to collapse the maths department and merge its component parts with the computing and engineering departments. The university will enforce these new arrangements over the next two years, even though the *Guardian* league table ranked the maths department at Nottingham Trent the fifth best in the country.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


I DON'T BELIEVE IT! IS IT REALLY HIM?
I'VE GONE ALL QUIVERY. I GET NERVOUS IN THE PRESENCE OF CELEBRITIES
WELL HE IS THE BEST INTERIOR DESIGNER IN ISLINGTON
BLAH BLAH ALCOVES BLAH BLAH TERRACOTTA

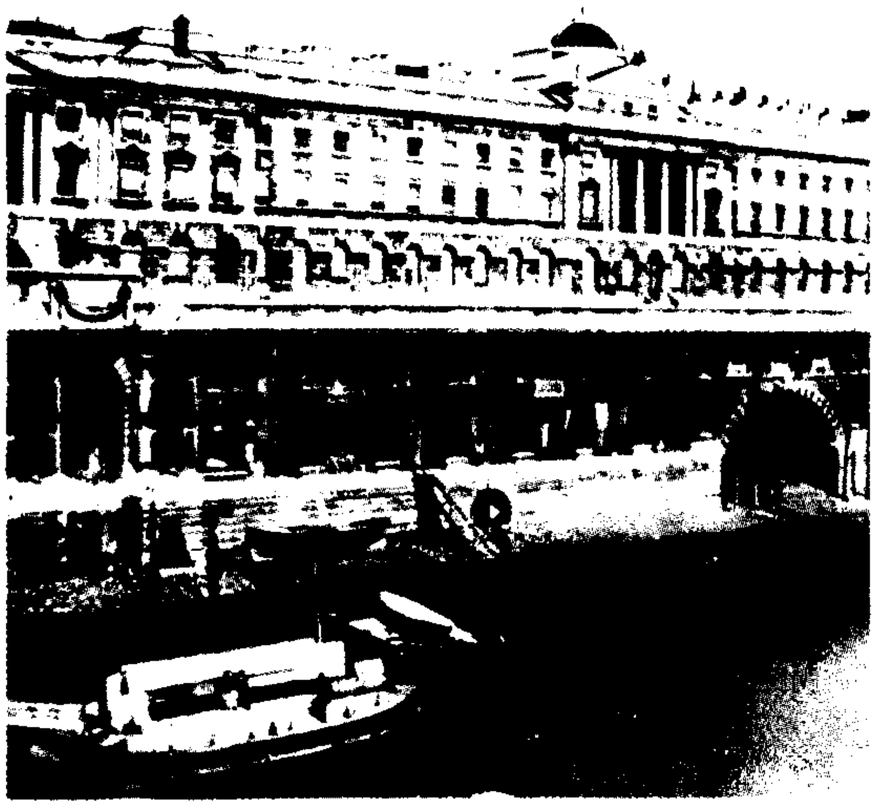
NOOKS and CORNERS

DEMOLITION continues... and the Brynmawr Rubber Factory is now a lost cause (*Eye* 1026). How pleased Rhodri Morgan, Wales's first minister, must be with himself for the masterly inactivity that has ensured the destruction of the finest modern building in Wales.

But Welsh politicians do not just hate recent buildings: there is also Christ Church, Caernarvon, a redundant Victorian church by Anthony Salvin (*Eye* 930).

A local group had wanted to convert it into an arts and community centre but this was effectively scuppered by Gwynnedd council, which blocked access to grant aid. Why? Because the conversion might jeopardise the council's own pet project for a Multi-Media Enterprise Centre elsewhere in Caernarvon – a £5m dream that has come to nothing.

So Christ Church was converted into a children's entertainment centre by developers funded by the Welsh Development Agency. The building was gutted without listed building consent, resulting in the loss of the historic contents stored there — including an important 18th century chamber organ by George Pyke. Various amenity groups asked Gwynnedd to stop the work until a listed building application had been submitted, but it declined. Now it emerges that this destruction was supported by a European union grant and was sponsored by the council – the same council that was unable to support the independent scheme to convert Christ Church for the benefit of the community. As at Brynmawr, public money is being (mis)used to promote destruction.



Somerset House in pre-Embankment days

THEN there is poor old Somerset House [Eyes passim]. At first it seemed a wonderful idea to clear the courtyard of cars, open up the riverside terrace and allow the public to enjoy what is surely the grandest and most distinguished Georgian public building in Britain. But then things began to go wrong: the ramp from Waterloo Bridge to the terrace is a crude disfigurement to Sir William Chambers's masterpiece, and now more destructive alterations are being mooted.

Jeremy Dixon Edward Jones, Architects, were invited by the trustees to investigate possible future developments in the complex. Their report envisages putting the floor back in West Street — the space between the West Wing and the Inland Revenue block on the Waterloo Bridge Approach — which is fine, except that they also suggest that the space is roofed over to make "a glazed street incorporating shops and cafes" — just like an airport or shopping centre — or even as "a fully operational banqueting hall".

But much worse is what is proposed for "The Embankment Entrance" or, rather, the Great Arch below the terrace. This was once the King's Barge Master's Entrance: the central of the three water gates through whose "Stygian blackness" boats could float from the Thames to gain access to the warehouse space deep below the courtyard — a brilliant idea of Chambers — but which was left high and dry by the building of the Victoria Embankment in the 1860s.

One of the triumphs of the first phase of opening up Somerset House to the public was recreating the Great Arch as a meaningful void, allowing access off the Embankment to reach both the Gilbert Collection and Somerset House as a whole. Now Dixon Jones propose making this space into an entrance lobby for the overweening Gilbert Collection, and "it would be advantageous to move the entrance forward directly under the archway". In other words, that means glazing it in, with a revolving glass-door in the centre. It is, of course, a common delusion among modern architects that glass is transparent and thus invisible. It is not: it reflects and is a visual barrier. To glaze in the Great Arch would be a retrogressive step which would destroy its character as a dark void.

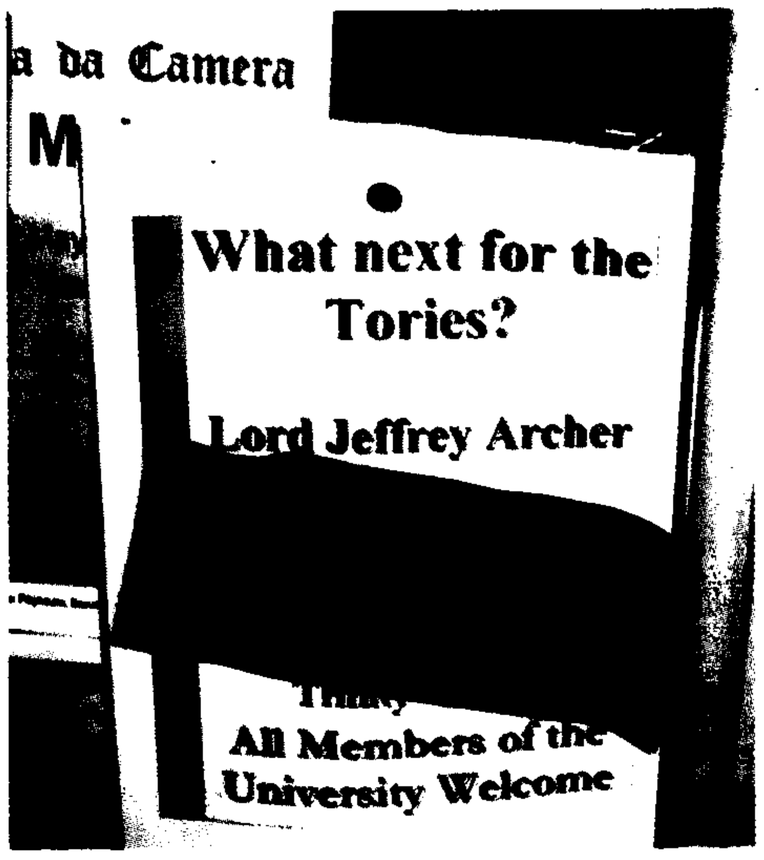
'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Let's face it, the Turner Prize is well past its sell-by date.
It meant something to be on that shortlist a few years ago – now it's just so old hat.
In fact, if I'd been asked this year, I'd have turned it down!
Waaa aaaa!
There, there.

I-SPY *Trinity College, Oxford*



Submitted by Jonathan Harvey. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

WHEN eminent if otherworldly composer Jonathan Harvey was preparing for the first performance of a new choral work in last month's Bath Festival, he was flattered to receive a call from a nice young woman on the *Independent* wanting to write a week-in-the-life profile leading up to the premiere.

She didn't seem to know much about Harvey's life, or work; or the contemporary music world in general; but then arts reporting on the *Indie* isn't what it was, and she seemed keen. So Harvey agreed and, over the next few days, obligingly explained the work routines, thoughts and reflections of a profoundly reflective, spiritually motivated creative artist – until it became apparent even to him that something was badly amiss.

In his quiet, mild-mannered way he wondered if the nice young woman had entirely grasped the subtle processes of choral composition. She expressed surprise. It turned out that she thought she had been interviewing Jonathan Harvey, the fashionable gay playwright whose raunchy sex-and-songs collaboration with the Pet Shop Boys, *Closer to Heaven*, was about to open in London.

"It's a mistake anyone could have made," said an *Indie* spokeswoman with the indifference newspapers have these days toward the serious coverage of serious art.

GLYNDEBOURNE-goers will not have failed to notice that the giving hand of Alberto Vilar has reached the South Downs.

The appallingly rich Cuban-born telecoms magnate has managed to become the world's most visible patron of the arts, with his name attached to opera projects from Los Angeles to St Petersburg. And the attachment of the name is always part of the deal. Hence what we are now obliged to call the *Vilar* Floral Hall at Covent Garden; and hence the whole page in the Glyndebourne programme book devoted to a tasteful photograph of Mr Vilar and an unusually grovelling thank you for the "unprecedented level" of his sponsorship for the company's new *Fidelio*.

Being so sensitive to name-awareness, he can't have been too happy the other week when he was being wined and dined at Glyndebourne and its chatelaine, the feisty Lady Mary Christie, kept on calling him *Alfredo*. He pretended not to notice, which was decent. But it remains to be seen how unprecedented next year's cheque will be.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Nothing but the hoof

Sir,

Thanks for the report on F&M, you are the only people telling the truth. I live in West Craven, right in the heart of the latest outbreak and have an intimate knowledge of the district and the farmers.

I'm sure you are right about the impending cull, MAFF have built Portakabin City at the Auction Market at Skipton, tarmac, sewers, the whole shebang, they are settling in there for the duration.

Since the start of the current outbreak in mid-May when the cattle were turned out to grass, the disease has followed the rivers that rise in the Settle area. The Ribble accounts for the Lancashire side and the Wharfe for the cases at Thorpe, Cracoe, Austwick, Gargrave and now Middleton at Ilkley.

MAFF blame the spread on farmers movements and claim the disease "jumped" 20 Km. This is not the case; all the evidence is that the biggest carrier is the rivers and it has been a logical progression by stages but no one is owning up to this.

We confidently expect the reinstatement of the contiguous cull after the election and massive slaughter round here. Please keep banging away at this, nobody else seems to care a toss.

STANLEY GRAHAM,

Barnoldswick, Lancashire.

The culling fields

Sir,

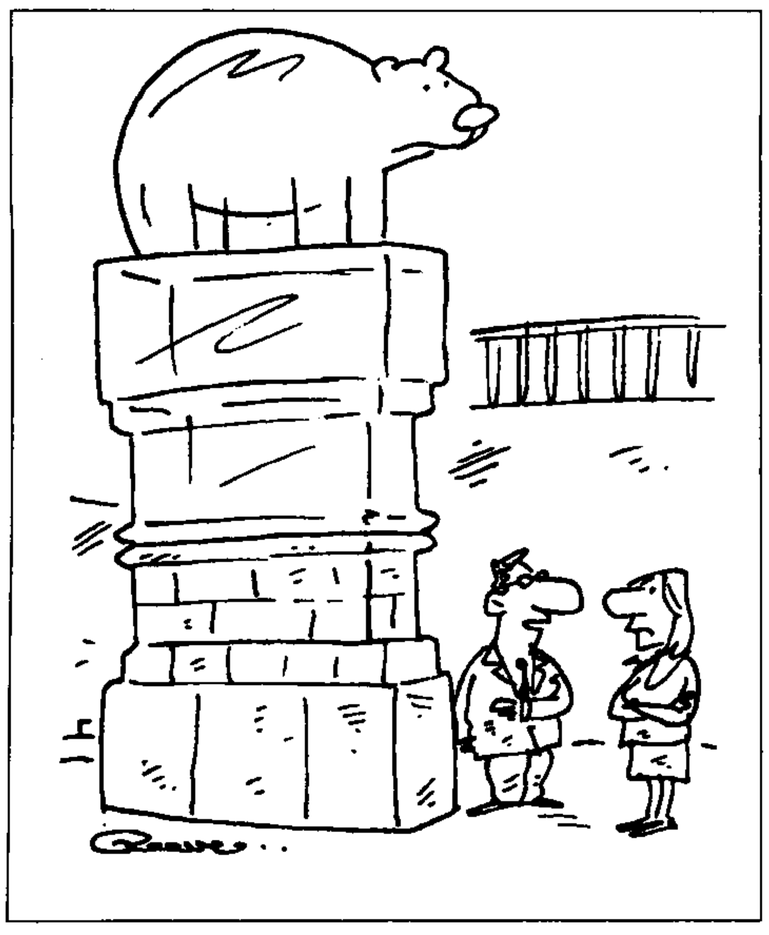
It's no surprise that MAFF completely ignores all regulations concerning "sympathetic treatment" of the animals they are about to cull, eliminate or just kill.

Years ago when Edwina Currie sparked off a wave of decimating poultry flocks with the aim of eliminating salmonella, MAFF hired teams of redundant miners who horrified farmers with their methods of slaughtering birds. Chickens were clubbed or stomped to death with absolute disregard for humane conditions. Of course the resulting egg shortage was avoided by importing unpacked eggs from Holland, a country with – at that time – a very high incidence of Salmonella, to be packed in boxes proclaiming them to be British produce.

Plus ça change.

DAVID WILLIAMS,

Leamington Spa.



Lice, damn lice

Sir,

The letter re Norwegian techniques to control farm sea lice was less than the whole truth. Wrasse, the sea lice-eating fish in question, are not effective for a number of pretty obvious reasons. They can limit sea lice damage to smolts (immature salmon) but, like smolts, wrasse are inoculated against the killer disease furunculosis, a costly process.

As farm salmon grow in size they have to be transferred to cages with a larger mesh size in order to increase water flow through the cages. The wrasse, smaller in size, eventually swim to freedom through the larger mesh. They are greatly encouraged to do so because, by that time, the salmon are eating them.

NAME & ADDRESS WITHHELD.

"My Dad's more absent than your Dad!"

SEXUALITY SPIRITUALITY
GROPING FOR GOD
Dr. Matthew Naylor (PhD) will explore what it means to be sexual and spiritual - gay, straight or in-between.
Brisbane City News

Reason to carp

Sir,

In a recent edition of Private Eye a small article appeared, under the heading Election Update, regarding North Tees & Hartlepool NHS Trust.

I have always been of the opinion that journalists working for such a high profile publication researched stories before they go to print. Obviously I am wrong, as the article about the prime minister's visit is completely inaccurate.

The prime minister's visit, to officially open the main entrance and maternity unit at the University Hospital of North Tees, took place on 4 May 2001. I believe, if you do a quick check, you will find that the general election was not called until 7 May 2001, therefore the visit was certainly not part of an election campaign.

More importantly, the carp were placed in the "concrete pond" a week before the prime minister's visit. The fish were certainly not "rented for the day" and all six are settling into their new abode quite nicely.

Incidentally, the fish are ghost carp and cost £6 each to buy. I don't think we could have rented them for less!

A few further facts for the record:

The carp would have been placed in the pond six or seven weeks before Tony Blair's visit, but experts (Kinross Nurseries – suppliers of aquatic fish) advised against this until late in April or early May. Apparently it is much too cold to move fish outside in the winter months.

The name of the hospital in question is the University Hospital of North Tees, not North Tees General.

Cleveland County no longer exists.

If you do decide to include stories about North Tees & Hartlepool NHS Trust in any future editions of Private Eye, please don't hesitate to check with us first to see if they are true.

Yours sincerely,

MRS JOAN E. ROGERS BA PhD,

Chief Executive, Hartlepool General Hospital.

Lookalike

Troll

Blair

Sir,

There appears to be a strong resemblance between the lifeless, plastic, humour-inducing figure above, and the favourite children's toy. The world should be told!

Yours,

STEVEN ALGIERI,

Hayling Island, Hants.

To the point of naivete

Sir,

The MMR vaccine can be dangerous. Just ask the 2000+ parents (many of whom have direct video evidence) whose children regressed into autism. The reason the government still backs the vaccine is because it is hell bent on herd immunity and a few thousand kids whose lives have been seriously affected is worthwhile collateral to achieve that goal. Given that the Institute of Medicine (IOM) has not ruled out a connection between autism/bowel disease and one of the most popular vaccines in the western world, where is the research? The Westminster government and its back-pocket scientist pals – the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) have backed off proper research in case it scares the population into thinking that the vaccine is not safe. Their attitude towards the parents and children affected has been utterly disgraceful.

Meanwhile, many thousands of parents are left with the choice (eh?) between risking their child catching the deadly disease measles or damaging their child for life with MMR.

Yours faithfully,

STEVE LAW,

Campaigner for Single Vaccines & Autism Resources, http://www.singlevaccines.com.

Marriage Agency
Russian Ladies
For eating, dating or marriage
Tokyo Classified

Bum notes

Sir,

You have an excellent organ and it is even better when you strike the right notes. Your "Music and Musicians" column in issue 1029 was a cacophony of nonsense.

Southern Arts did not axe the Bournemouth Sinfonietta. This sad episode took place before Southern Arts became responsible for funding the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra last year. The rest of what is said about our relationship with the Sinfonietta is equally inaccurate.

As to the future of Southern Arts: we have had over 500 letters about the Arts Council's retrograde idea of merging the 10 regional arts boards with the Arts Council. About 87 percent of those who have written reject the Arts Council's proposals and prefer the retention of Southern Arts in its present form.

Your sincerely,
ROBERT HUTCHISON,
Chief Exec, Southern Arts.

Baton charge

Sir,

When your correspondent Philip Jeays claims that "classical music is one of the few remaining bastions of talent, where performers still have a chance to rise to the top through ability and hard work," did you edit out the part where they continued "provided your parents can afford extremely expensive music lessons from childhood onwards, as well as the purchase and repair of equally expensive instruments"? Or is the complete absence of working-class accents on Radio 3 down to the proletariat's total lack of talent and aversion to hard work? Or was it actually meant as an entry for "Oh, Yeah"?

Yours,
JUSTIN HORTON,
Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Sir,

Such touching naivete from Philip Jeays. Classical musicians rarely "rise to the top of their profession through ability and hard work". No more than the rest of us do. To get in in the first place you have to know and be known by the right people. And the casting couch remains a well-trodden route into the orchestra. You'll be telling us next that musicians really appreciate the better virtuosity of other players. Tut tut. Some of us obviously spend far too long listening to Classic FM and its unknowledgeable DJs. No. Classical music is a cut-throat, snobbish, deeply competitive world as it always has been. A profession that has regularly killed or rejected its most talented, whether they be a Mozart, Bizet or a Beethoven.

JOHN N. SUTHERLAND,
St Andrews, Scotland.

Biting wit

Sir,

I don't often disagree with Messrs Snipcock and Tweed but shurely the sequel to "Nigella Bites" should be titled "Nigella Swallows"?

Yours, gagging for it,
JON WIMBUSH,
W. Yorks.

Wap Phone

All my loving...

Sir,

I absolutely loved, laughed at, and sniggered at Literary Review's Paul McCartney piece. It's about time somebody gave Jurassic Macca a taste of real life criticism. John Lennon once sang "the only thing you ever did was yesterday". How true.

PETE WATSON,
Via e-mail.

...and mine too

Sir,

Bookworm's lively (but very predictable) assault on Paul McCartney fairly rattled along but anyone who describes the White Album as "dreary", destroys any credibility they may have.

Whether you like it or not, Paul McCartney is one of the greatest songwriters ever. He's also a brilliant singer and a fine musician. He seems to be a decent guy into the bargain, remaining so in the face of the enormous odds laid down by global fame and unimaginable financial wealth.

What's the problem?

ANDREW BROPHY,
Via e-mail.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"David O'Leary's poker face betrays the emotions..."
CLIVE TYLDESLEY, ITV
(David Adams)

"Israel is demanding that the Palestinian authorities arrest those people who have undertaken suicide bombings."
Middle-East Correspondent, Radio 4
(Neil Churchill)

"It's like the Sea of Galilee – the two defenders just parted."
MARK LAWRENSON, Radio 5 Live
(David Solley)

"He's drawn right in the middle – in other words, he is drawn right in the middle."
WILLIE CARSON
(Tony Lomas)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from **Abuja**
from Our Own Correspondent

WHILE we were suffering under the yoke of military rule, the outside world shunned us for the corruption, incompetence and abuses of our leaders. So, when the khaki-clad boys finally packed their bags two years ago, we in Nigeria rejoiced, looked to the future and thanked all our foreign friends for their pledges of help on the road to democracy.

"Uncle" Olusegun Obasanjo, our elected leader and a former military ruler, is still welcomed at the White House and Downing Street as the likely saviour of our great nation, Africa's biggest, with a population of more than 100 million. Sadly, here on the ground things don't look quite so good.

As one of the world's main oil producers, we should be booming on the back of high prices. We are not. Inflation is rising, our currency is collapsing, the telephones never work, electricity and water are more rare than an honest government official. Our schools and hospitals are falling down – but we are getting a new $500m sports stadium.

"Uncle" tells anyone who will listen that he is doing his best. He rails against corruption and has set up what he promises will be an independent commission to deal with offenders. But it has no money and no influence. Its chairman recently revealed that he had asked each of our 36 thoroughly honest, dedicated and hardworking state governors to make anti-corruption proposals, but had only received a single reply: that the independent commission itself should be scrapped.

So, with a government stacked with cronies, incompetents and worse – one minister has been persistently hounded by rumours of mental ill-health – we are again looking for help from abroad to save us from ourselves. The Americans are here training our army. The Europeans are drawing up a huge aid budget. And the British have arrived in force to help teach us about democracy and clean government. Frankly, we had our doubts: it's not so long ago that the foreign office went to some trouble to keep quiet the removal of consular officers caught up in a multimillion dollar scam stretching back years that helped some of our most ambitious drug smugglers and social security fraudsters gain British visas.

Now it is the department for international development (DFID) that seems to be taking firmly to heart the aid industry's mantra that assistance programmes should seek to learn as much about the local environment in which they operate as they hope to teach. We are proud to note the efforts made by DFID's army of expatriates to assimilate local culture and do things the Nigerian way. We like the even-handed way that local staff, with the same qualifications as our imported consultants and experts, receive a fraction of what their light-skinned counterparts receive for doing the same job. And DFID gamely continues to work with a government everyone knows exists mostly to allow office holders to cream off public funds for personal use.

We can only assume the behaviour of some DFID staff is part of a careful strategy to win the confidence of some of our guilty power brokers and change the system from the inside. How else can we explain the peculiar lack of prudence in spending DFID money in which senior programme officials seem to delight?

Nigerian staff are increasingly fed up being expected to run around sorting out the expats' mansions in Abuja, covering for the hopeless alcoholic who can't do his work, and looking on with astonishment as ridiculous quotations for housing and office space are accepted and paid without question. In a splurge worthy of Lord Irvine, £15,000 has gone on the curtains for one room. We scoff at the idea that the whole programme is just for show, totally lacking in any accountability or credibility, with expats either demoralised or so comfortable with their fat salaries and allowances that they just don't care. And it would, of course, be absurd to suggest that those sent from the mother country to help us clean up our act might themselves now be on the make.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

O "We have done nothing wrong," Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Phoenix, Arizona told reporters, "and I tell you now that the web cams will stay in Maricopa County Women's Prison. However, following complaints from inmate-rights groups and the state attorney-general, we have reluctantly agreed to turn off one of the jail cams. The 'can cam,' the one that showed female inmates using the toilet."

Sheriff Arpaio was defending his actions after criticism from Donna Hamm, the director of the Middle Ground inmate-rights group in Tempe, Arizona. "It's outrageous," she said. "The jail cam in the toilet was clearly exploiting the women, and was linked to several pornographic sites on the Internet. Anyone logging onto would see a sign saying 'first live web cam from inside a working jail! You may see violence or sexually inappropriate behaviour,' so they knew what they were there for. And the women inmates had no option but to use the toilet in full view of the camera. Where is the dignity?"

But Sheriff Arpaio (dubbed "the nation's toughest sheriff" for such practices as dressing male prisoners in pink underwear) was unrepentant. "Anyone who wanted to see the women on the toilet had to give us their e-mail address first. We were even considering a credit card system, with all profits going to the jail's chapel. No juveniles would have been displayed. Unless they looked older and lied to us about their age, I suppose." *(The Globe and Mail [Toronto], 28/4/01. Spotter: Wallace Brown)*

— O —

O *"Yes, that's right. We are urgently trying to locate the buyers of seventeen improperly-labelled perennials," a spokesman for the Valleybrook Gardens nursery admitted to reporters in Abbotsford, British Columbia. "Unfortunately only eight have been accounted for so far, and this is a cause of some concern to us. You see, the perennials should have been labelled 'all parts of this plant are toxic.' But it seems that they were incorrectly labelled 'all parts of this plant are good 'n' tasty, especially in soup.'*

"After investigations, it has emerged that one of our employees did this as a practical joke, thinking that a horticulturalist would quickly spot the alteration, and change the labels back again. However, nobody did, and the plants went on sale. Yes, they could be fatal, but you'd have to eat at least two bowls of soup. The employee has now been suspended." (Marin Independent Journal, 30/4/01. Spotter: Mark N. Dunning)

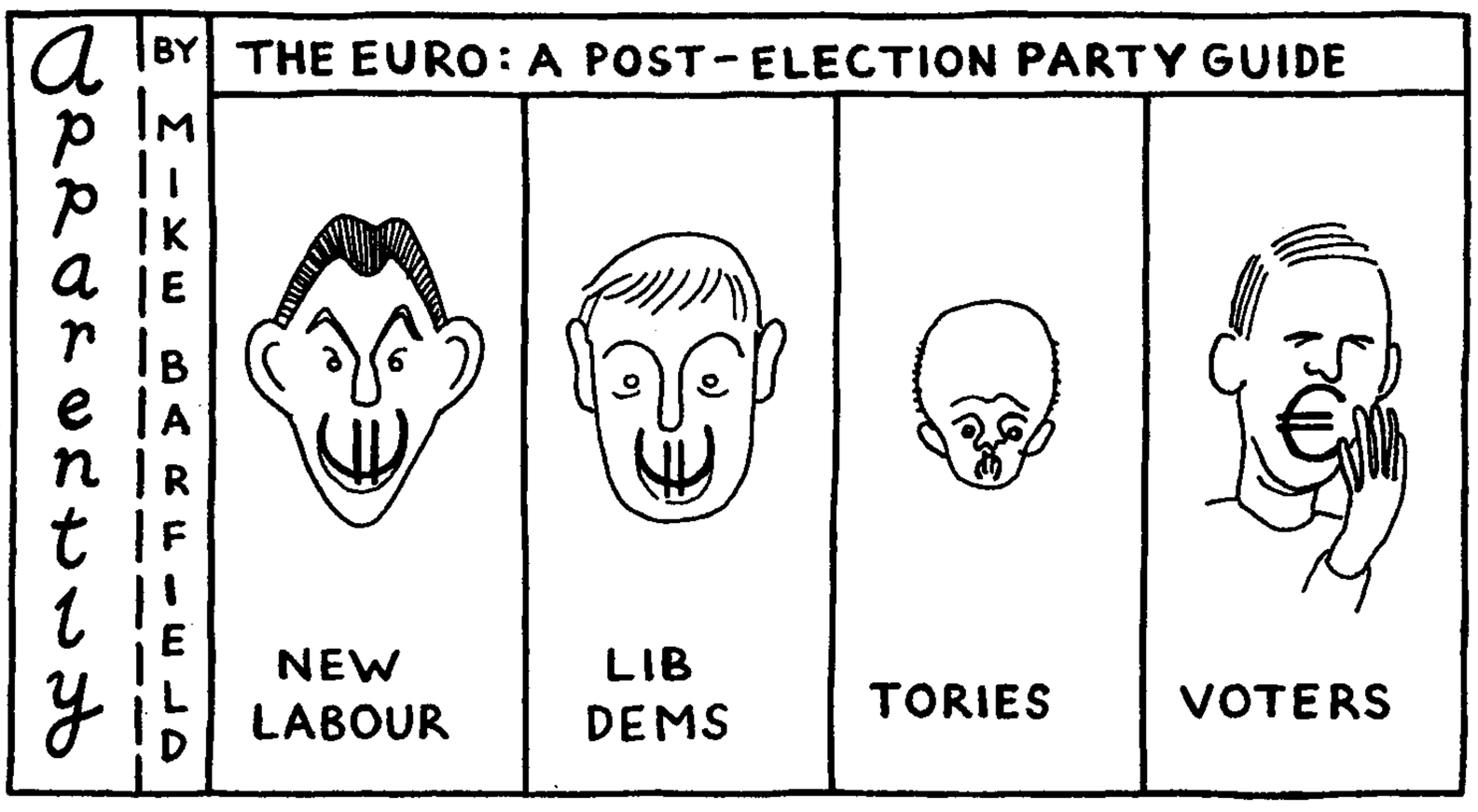
— O —

O "As God is my witness, I am innocent," lay preacher Peter David explained to magistrates in Neath. "In fact, God will be my witness in this case, and His testimony will prove that I do not need car insurance, and that I should immediately be found not guilty of all charges."

Sixty-six-year-old David then revealed that the Almighty had specifically exempted him from the need for tax, insurance, or an MOT certificate. "When the police stopped me, I explained to them that the Lord had told me I no longer needed car insurance, because he had blessed me with His divine protection. That was good enough for me, but not apparently for the police. I even explained that my number plate, DEUT 818, referred to the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 8, verse 18,

where God specifically warns that He is the only source of power. But they just said it wasn't registered with the DVLC in Swansea, and arrested me. I tried to tell the police that I travelled with God as my passenger, but they chose to use sarcasm, saying 'the Lord really does move in mysterious ways then.' Never mind. I will fight the case, and God's testimony will prove me right. And may the arresting officer be struck down with cancer."

God did not arrive at the court to bear witness, and the case was adjourned. *(South Wales Evening Post, 17/4/01. Spotter: Alan Davies)*

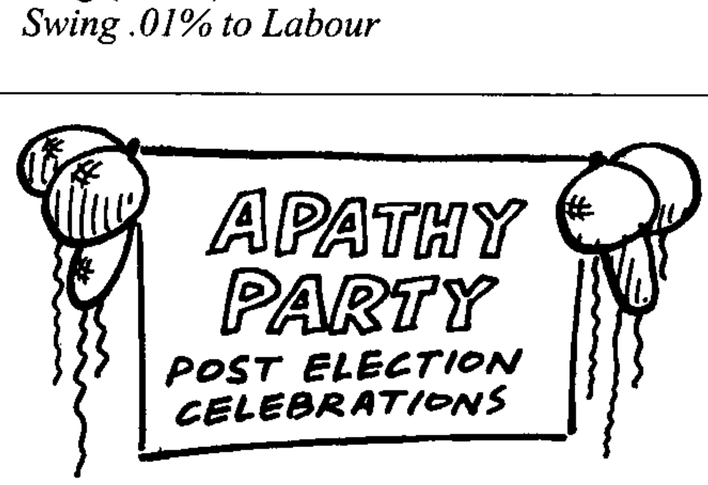


Election Results In Full

Middle England Central

Mike Lobbyfodder (Lab) 22,374; Libby Dem (Lib Dem) 19,748; Nicholas Washedup (Conservative) 3,722: Sandra Swampy (Green) 278; Dave Scargs (Socialist Alliance) 3; CJP Barking (UKIP) 3

Swing .01% to Labour



"Great evening – what a low turn-out!"

What You Didn't See On Election Night *(Fortunately)*

John Snow: Yes, well, that's amazing and if we reproduce that swing in Oldham across the country then we have the BNP getting seats in all these constituencies *(Snow points to swastika logos appearing on map)*... and if you watch the graphics there goes the leader of the BNP goose-stepping up the staircase towards Number Ten and, er, back to David in the studio...

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And what a wonderful week for the parish this has been!

And of course I don't just mean for me personally, but for all those unsung heroes (and heroines!) behind the scenes who have done all the small but essential jobs which you don't hear about – keeping the tea urn warm, arranging the flowers, hoovering up the biscuits in the creche and looking after the parish finances.

I am sure our treasurer Mr Brown will not mind if I don't single him out for special praise, because there are so many others who have done so much in so many ways, with a lot less thanks than Mr Brown has had!

Above all, this has been a team effort, from the Greek "teamos", meaning a "wise leader" and "effortikos", meaning "who does it all by himself".

I met one parishioner over the weekend who couldn't wait to shake my hand, and said "Vicar, you must be very, very proud – this is a real personal triumph for you!"

Well, I hear what she says (and I agree with it!). But at the same time I think it is very important that one doesn't get big-headed about being the most popular and successful vicar the parish has ever had!

That's why I am rather dubious about the suggestion made by so many of you that my name should go forward for beatification.

It is kind of them to point out that I have already performed the necessary two miracles, at two successive PCC elections!

But, really, I think we all should wait a bit, before rushing into the sanctification business!

I know "St Anthony" has rather a ring to it! But let's just keep it to "Rev. Tony" for the time being, shall we?

Tony

Sadly, there is no room this week to print the usual picture of the church. Instead we have a charming photo of the vicar telling parishioners that they should concentrate on the issues and not on personalities

To Remember In Your Prayers

■ Mr Vaz, who will be leaving the PCC and hopefully the parish. He will be taking with him the good wishes of all the parish as well as a great deal of money he has accumulated from a variety of sources. Let us pray that we never hear of Mr Vaz ever again. For ever and ever. Amen.

Valete

It's a sad day for us all as we say farewell to Mr Chris Smith who has been in charge of the St Albion's Arts Festival and the new unbuilt Under 11 football pitch on the wasteland behind the cemetery. Many of you have expressed your regret at his leaving and seem to think he has done a marvellous job. This may well be so, but I happen to know that Mr Smith wanted to spend more time with his family even though he hasn't got one. T.B.

A warning from Mr Blunkett, new Head of Neighbourhood Watch

Whatever you are doing, stop it!
Because I am watching you.
Signed Lucy the Dog,
pp. Mr Blunkett

SERVICE OF HUMBLE THANKSGIVING FOR A GREAT VICTORY

PEAL OF BELLS
(starting six in the morning and continuing all day)
Ringers: A. Darling, S. Byers, A. Milburn

ANTHEM
See The Conquering Hero Comes
(attrib. T. Blair)

Procession from the coffee area to the altar

BIDDING PRAYER
(the Vicar)

"Brothers and sisters, we give thanks for this, our crushing landslide, and in a spirit of deep humility we rejoice in the destruction of all our enemies, as they are cast down into the pit, and from thenceforth into outer darkness for ever and ever. Amen."

RESPONSES

All: Alleluia, allelulia!
Vicar: We are re-elected!
All: We are re-elected indeed!

CREED

All: We do not believe in very much, but we do believe in the re-election. Amen.
Vicar: Thanks be to the Lord Levy.
All: And all our other sponsors!

HYMN

(Chorus)
We have overcome, we have overcome,
We have overcome this day.
Deep in our hearts we do believe
It's thanks to the third way!

THE BLESSING

Vicar: Bless you all!
All: No – bless *you*, Vicar!
Vicar: Would you all now stand for the Recession.

Order of Service printed free of charge by R. Desmond, publishers of adult multi-ethnic literature, by appointment to the Vicar.

WOMEN'S GROUP

Mrs Jowell writes:

Thanks to the Vicar's initiative, there are going to be more women than ever on the PCC – Ms Morris, Ms Hewitt, Ms Beckett and myself, to name but all of us!
My own responsibility will be to look at ways to organise people's leisure time – they seem to have far too much of it and appear to spend it by eating, drinking and enjoying themselves in an unstructured way. From now on, I will be trying to turn people's "Free Time" into something more productive. T.J.

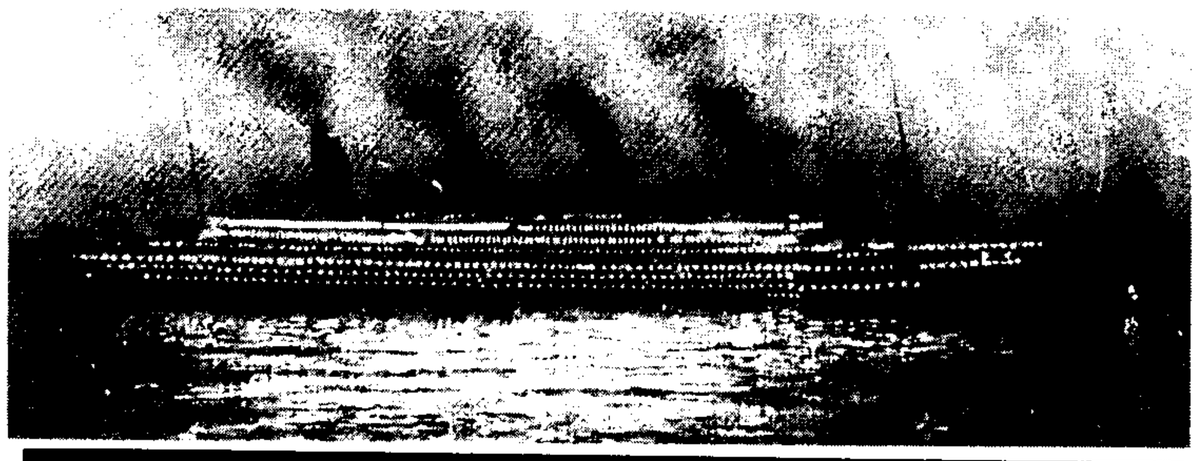
Parish Letters

Dear Sir,

May I be allowed to put the record straight regarding my promotion. It is quite untrue that I had angry words with the Vicar over his decision to give my post as organist to Mr Straw, even though, as everyone knows, he is completely useless and not nearly as clever as me. My new job handing out the hymn sheets is actually a much more important job than Mr Straw's, involving a detailed

Yours faithfully (providing I keep the house),
Robin Cook

The Editor reserves the right to cut all correspondence from people who are not important any more.



WHO WILL BE THE NEW CAPTAIN OF THE TITANIC?

By Our Political Staff **Michael Whitestarline**

WILLIAM Hague has sensationally quit his post as Captain of the Titanic after the second sinking of the vessel in only four years.

At the weekend, a number of hopefuls were already throwing their caps into the icy water.

First to declare herself was the ship's matron, Miss Doris Karloff, who has been described by experts as "unthinkable". She said last night:

"William has done a superb job in sinking the boat with the loss of all hands. But now it really is time for someone else to steer us into the iceberg again.

"I shall be glug glug glug," she told reporters.

Various other members of the crew were also keen to take command of the bridge, foremost amongst them the Spanish-born purser Michael Porthole, who has already teamed up with former first officer Kenneth Clark.

ANCRAM'S AWAY

"Together we could really go places," said Porthole enthusiastically, "like the bottom of the ocean. Glug... glug... glug."

Others who have put their name forward for the merchant navy's top job are:

- **Ian Suncan-Smith, described as an intensely able swimmer.**
- **Tim Yeo - Must - Be - Joking, known to be very much at home in a life jacket.**
- **Francis Overbaude, a man who many believe will effectively take the ship all the way to Drowning Street.** *(That's enough Titanic story. Ed.)*

MORAL MUSE

Margaret Cook

Dear Margaret

Over the past decade I've enjoyed a committed, long-term relationship with a man called Tony. He's always been very good to me and I thought we had something special, then out of the blue the other day he dumped me for Jack. Now I find out from Gordon that he's been plotting behind my back to get rid of me for months. To be so casually tossed aside in such a brutal callous manner after years of faithful service is devastating. I feel angry, bitter, resentful and yet curiously powerless. Tony's even told me to return the keys of my precious country house. What do you think of the callous brutal way I've been treated?

Robin
(address supplied – London)

Dear Robin

Ha ha ha ha ha ha.

Margaret

"Robin Cook to go"

DAILY MAIL-CHAUVINIST EXCLUSIVE

WIDDECOMBE'S AMAZING MAKEOVER

BEFORE: hard, tough, uncompromising

AFTER: caring, sharing, electable

TV HIGHLIGHTS

FATAL ATTRACTION II

CHILLING thriller in which a happily married poet laureate is tormented by a female student with whom he has an ill-judged flirtation. Set in the campus of an East Anglian Polytechnic, the lecturer Andrew Motion (Charles Dance) is stalked by torrid Caribbean temptress Laura Fish (Naomi Campbell). Try as he may, the lecherous poet cannot avoid his doom as the sultry siren writes "a pot boiler" and sells it to the Sunday Times.

Eye Rating: z-z-z-z

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL NEWSPAPERS

BOY TALKS TO GIRLS

by Harry Potty

A TEENAGE boy talked to some girls over the weekend near his father's house in Gloucestershire.

(Reuters)

That Tory Election 2004 Winning Strategy In Full

1 Lock Mrs Thatcher in basement for whole campaign.
2 Change name to "Save Kidderminster Hospital Party".
3 Er, that's it.

"They've romped into third place"

OLD BAGS (SURELY 'GAGS'?) REVISITED

THIS WEEK

RONNIE BIGGS

Were English spoons one of the things you missed during your years in Brazil?

To begin with, yeah, a bit. But you soon get used to the foreign ones. They're just as good in their way.

What do you like most about spoons?

It's got to be the handle. That makes it useful for all kinds of things. Like opening doors!

So did you use spoons in your professional life?

Ha, ha. That would be telling! You'll have to wait for my memoirs for that one!

Have you ever stolen any spoons?

Of course I have. As a kid, we was always nicking spoons. But in those days they were worth nicking. Nowadays, they're all rubbish.

So you would say spoons were better in the old days?

Oh yeah. It's like everything else. My nan had this amazing spoon, really old it was, and I nicked it off her and sold it to a bloke in the Portobello Road for thirty bob. Those were the days!

Do they allow you to use spoons in prison?

Yeah, but they're only plastic. Rubbish. Not worth nicking at all.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with your spoon?

No.

NEXT WEEK: Sheridan Morley, *Me and My Coat Hanger.*

Edward Montagu's is an unconventional life story. Born in 1926, he succeeded to the peerage in 1929 having been educated at Eton and New College Oxford.

Daily Telegraph

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Anthony Quinn, Hollywood Legend

So. Farewell then
Anthony Quinn.

You made many
Famous films.
But none more famous than
Zorba The Greek.

Ga-zung. Ga-zung
Ga-zung, Ga-zung, Ga-zung.
Yes, that
Was your
Theme tune.

Personally I preferred you in
The Guns Of Navarone.
My favourite bit is where
The Girl shoots
The other one
For being a Nazi sympathiser.

Where Eagles Dare.
That was another one.

But I don't think
You were in that
One

E.J. Thribb (17½)

E.J. Thribb has recently been appearing at the Hay-on-Wye Festival, reading from his new collection *Letters To President Clinton.*

How Lord Birt Will Cut Whitehall Bureaucracy

That Ten Point Plan In Full

1 Bureaucracy will be divided into two directorates – Bureaucracy Production and Bureaucracy Output. The two directorates will operate an internal market supplying red tape to each other in competitive quantities.

2 A team of bureaucracy consultants will be brought in to advise on strategies for streamlining bureaucracy. They will report to a consultative committee which will be answerable to a bureaucracy task force which will in turn analyse the findings and will offer them for independent audit by the original consultants.

3 24-hour bureaucracy will be introduced with round-the-clock rolling red tape providing paperwork day and night as and when it happens.

4 Digital bureaucracy will capitalise on the opportunities for bureaucracy in the new technologies of the 21st century. This will create a greater choice of alternative red tape products for the consumer, eg state-of-the-art paperclips and interactive virtual filing cabinets.

5 Bureaucracy will be repeated as a matter of policy with another chance to see classic instances of red tape on Bureaucracy Choice, Bureaucracy Knowledge and Bureaucracy World.

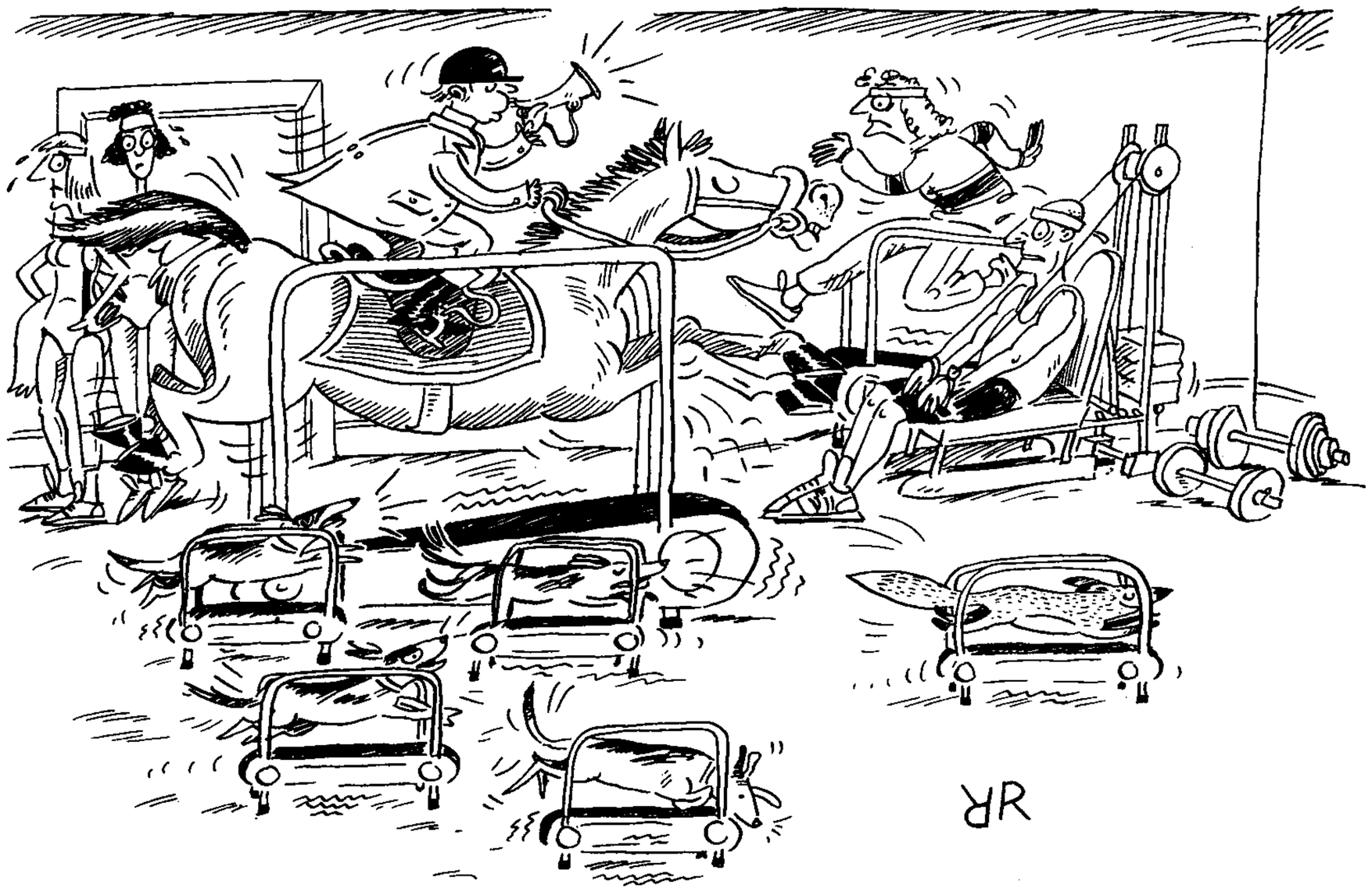
6 Top mandarins will be given million pound contracts to prevent them defecting to competitors (eg, the EC) to ensure "world class bureaucratic talent" remains in Whitehall.

7 Key Whitehall departments will be prepared for sell-off to the private sector with the Home Office to become a division of Sky TV and the Treasury to be run by Richard Branson.

8 The Bureaucracy Tsar will appoint his wife, his dog and all his old friends to important well-paid posts in the new expanded cut-down Whitehall machine.

9 Er...

10 That's it.



It Really Is Nepalling

A new short story from the pen of Sylvie Krin

(winner of the 1983 Betty Trash Award for Romantic Fiction)

THE STORY SO FAR: Charles and Camilla are watching Sky News as it reports the latest harrowing scenes in the tiny mountain kingdom of Nepal.

Now read on...

"IT REALLY is appalling." Charles gestured towards the 94in wide-screen Hirohito TV set, a gift from his friend the Emir of Dubya in return for a year's supply of organic chocolate chip and ginger oatcake from the famous Highgrove Biscuit Workshop.

"It really is appalling," he repeated to his beautiful paramour and life partner, as she poured them both a soothing nightcap of 140° Taliban whisky.

"I mean, Dippy was such a terrific chap when I knew him."

They both stared as the screen showed the burning pyre on which the old Etonian king-for-a-day was going up in wreaths of incense-laden smoke.

"I say, Chazza, what's going on? It's not more of that ghastly foot and mouth, is it?"

"No, old thing." Charles did his best to conceal his irritation at Camilla's lack of interest in world affairs and in what he called 'the you know, things that really matter'.

He explained to her that his old friend, the Crown Prince of Nepal, had unfortunately had a moment of madness and murdered his entire family with a Rachmaninov AK94 automatic sub-machine gun.

"I can't understand it," Charles murmured. "I remember once staying with him in one of his palaces at the foot of the Himalayas.

"I actually did a rather good watercolour from his veranda, looking out over what they call the Valley of the 17,000 Lotus Blossoms."

Charles took a sip of his nocturnal beverage as his thoughts turned to his beloved paintings. "It's the one on the landing upstairs, outside the room where I keep my polo things. You must have noticed it. Sir Hugh Casson said it was the best thing I ever did."

"Come off it, Chazza, the old toady said that about all of them," snorted Camilla topping up his tumbler with more of the exquisite amber fluid from the remote Highland distillery of Glen Iskinnock.

"I can almost smell those lotus blossom-thingies now," Charles mused, "the sun coming up over the distant peak of Mount Bunjijumpa, the sound of the monks chanting in the valley below..."

"I'm just popping out for a last fag in the garden," Camilla interrupted, a trifle brusquely, leaving Charles alone in a strange state of hypnotic reverie.

"I just can't believe it..."

"I JUST can't believe it!" barked the Duke of Edinburgh. Even at 80, his voice still carried the same unmistakable ring of command that had boomed out over the quarterdeck of the corvette HMS Intolerant of which he had been First Officer 60 years before.

"Don't be hard on the boy," said Her Majesty the Queen. "It's not been easy for him having you as a father."

"Bollocks," harrumphed the Duke, as he gazed round at the room-full of his assembled relatives.

And what a shower the House of Windsor had become.

The Princess Royal, looking more like one of her damn horses every day.

The Duke of York, reminding him of the sort of fat boy he and his friends had enjoyed bullying at Gordonstoun.

That big girl's blouse, Edward, with his grasping wife.

And he didn't even recognise half of them. Who was the bearded Johnny who looked like the Czar?

And that other one who was always at Wimbledon kissing female tennis players? Damned if he could remember.

As for that woman in the wheelchair, was that really his sister-in-law? She looked even older than the dear old Queen Mother who, frankly, was the only one he had any time for.

"I just can't believe it," the Duke reiterated. "After all these years, my damfool son has decided that he can't just go on keeping this woman of his as a bit on the side, as any sensible chap would do."

The Queen coughed irritably, kicking a corgi under the sofa to express her disapproval of her husband's nautical disregard for the estate of marriage.

"He's now insisting on a full-dress wedding in the Abbey, presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi and some ayatollah-wallah with a beard and a tea towel on his head.

"Well, all I can say, is that Charles will marry her over my dead body."

His words were drowned by the deafening roar of a helicopter as it landed on the palace roof.

Within seconds, the French windows were shattered, as a uniformed figure in a balaclava and full battle fatigues leaped SAS-style into the room.

Rolling over expertly, he sprang to his feet brandishing a Terminator 3 assault weapon. It was Charles.

"Now listen to me, Pater and Co. I've had it right up to here with, you know, all of you.

"I'm jolly well going to marry Camilla, whatever you say. And you won't say anything, because you're all going to be deaded."

His voice broke into a manic Goon-style shriek.

With a final piercing cry of "Yin-tong-diddle-i-po," the Crown Prince of England prepared to squeeze the trigger and win his place in the history books by spraying the room with a deadly hail of lead.

"Really, Charles," his mother protested, "it's past your bedtime..."

"REALLY, CHARLES, it's past your bedtime." Charles woke with a start, to see his consort shaking his shoulder gently.

"Oh dear," he said, "I've just been having the most appalling nightmare. I didn't want it to end."

He rose shakily to his feet. What was it his old friend and mentor Sir Laurens Van der Post had so often told him about dreams, as they sat around the camp fire in the Kalaghasi Desert?

"Does the man dream of being a butterfly, or does the butterfly dream of being a man?"

How very true that was, whatever it meant...

© *Sylvie Krin 2001.*

KIDS SAY THE FUNNIEST THINGS

Dear friends,

This month we look forward to an important occasion in the lives of some of our young people. On May 13th, 7 of them will be at admitted to receive communism.

Chelmsford Diocesan Monthly

The Mirror, *Friday, June 15, 2001*

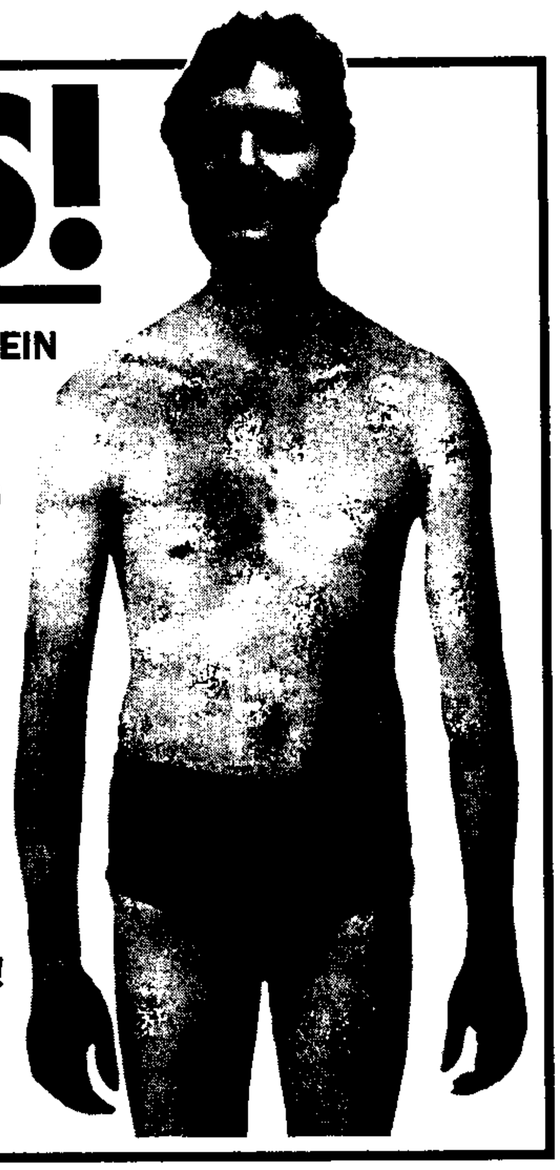
PANTS!

By Our Political Staff CALVIN KLEIN

YES! It's the question everyone in politics wants to know. What sort of pants does Piers Morgan wear? Now it can be revealed. They're brown!

Says Piers, "Of course they are brown. But it's nothing to do with fashion. It's because I'm terrified of being sacked and going to jail after the DTI investigation into my dodgy share dealings.

"That's why," he continued, "my newspaper says Vote Labour! The Government is wonderful! Blair is marvellous! Give me, I mean Tony, another chance."



"Well, as ghosts go, he seems pretty friendly"

THE BOOK OF AMIEL

Chapter 94

1. And behold, there was a woman of Is-rael whose name was Bar-bara, daughter of Amiel.
2. And she was exceeding comely, even as are the maidens who adorn the sea coast of Eilat in the posters that offereth a cheap winter break.
3. And, lo, there was a certain rich man, who was called Con-rad. And he espied Bar-bara and said unto himself, "I would lie with her, for she is truly an dish".
4. Then Con-rad put aside his wife and took unto himself Bar-bara, and they lived together as man and wife in the wharf that is called Can-ary.
5. And Bar-bara cometh unto her husband and saith "Behold, I am filled with prophecy. I see my people Is-rael sorely beset on every hand".
6. "For the Arab-ites and the Araf-ites have risen up against them, and cast stones upon them. And the children of Is-rael have nothing with which to defend themselves, excepts tanks, planes, rockets and attack helicopters."
7. And Con-rad saith unto her "What shall I do?"
8. And she spelleth it out "Give me an whole page of your newspaper, which is called the Daily Telaviv *(Surely 'graph'? God)*, that I may fill it with my prophetic utterances – ie, that the children of Is-rael must keep smiting, for it is the only language these Arab-ites understand."
9. And Con-rad did as he was commanded, because he was sore afraid of his wife.
10. And so it came to pass that the prophet Amiel was able to speak out with a loud voice on behalf of the children of Is-rael.
11. And Sharon, the ruler of the land of Is-rael, rejoiced exceeding glad, saying "Look, not everyone thinketh that I am a bully and a monger of wars. For here is a mighty prophetess who agreeth with everything I have done, except that when it cometh to the smiting, she wanteth even more of it."

THAT WAS THE ELECTION THAT WAS

THE EYE's top team look back on the highlights of the 2001 campaign.

Man With Glasses
The defining moment of this election has to be my interview with Alistair Darling when he admitted to me that his socks were made in Europe. From then on, Labour were in trouble.

Woman you haven't heard of
My visit to the key marginal of Lymeswold was the real turning point of the election. My prediction that the seat was "too close to call" set the campaign alight and ensured a Lib Dem victory.

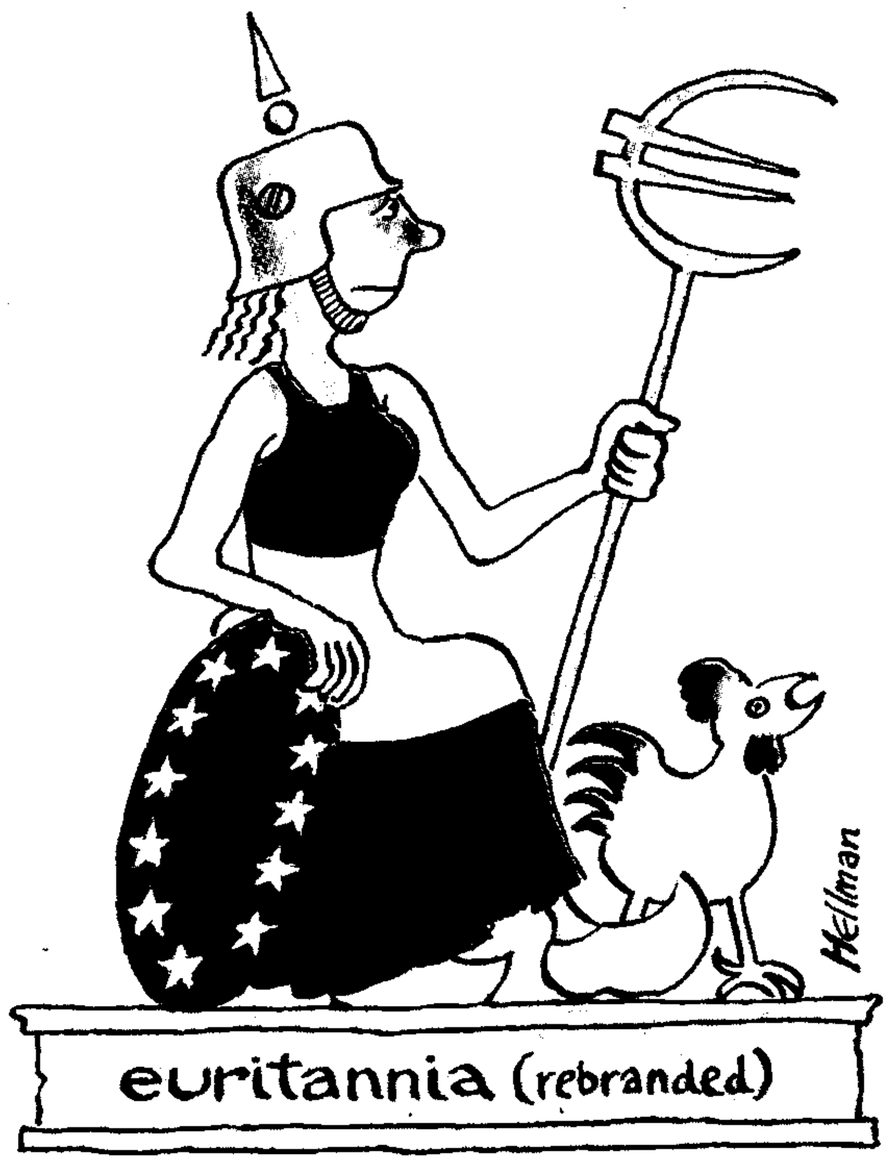
Man with bow tie
My poll of poll of polls on Day 94 lit the fuse that set the election on fire, revealing as it did that 32% of the 74% of Tory Don't Knows who were willing to vote tactically in 1997 had reduced by 14% compared with the 1967 figure of Labour waverers (63%).

Young bloke
First-time text-message voters were the big issue in this election and my interview with Green Party website designer Dave Sprout defined the youth agenda for the entire election.

Someone amusing
There was only one joke on everyone's lips in this election and it was one I made in my wry, amusing, sideways look at Ann Widdecombe's campaign. "Widdy for Home Secretary? Fat chance!!" I quipped and from that moment on the Tories were finished.

Another woman
Women's issues dominated the campaign and my profile of Blair Babe Patsy Jacket revealed how approximately half the voting population were actually women. As Ms Jacket told me, "Tony Blair is a woman's man."

Old man
It was when I saw Gordon Brown on the stump and compared him to James Chuter Ede in the 1959 Wiresfield By-Election which brought back memories of Disraeli's historic victory over Gladstone in the so-called "Top Hat Tax Election" of 1863 that the fate of New Labour was sealed. As I put it so memorably, "Plus ça change. Will this do?"



CHARLES KENNEDY
An Apology

IN COMMON with all other newspapers, we may have given the impression that the leader of the Liberal Democrat Party Mr Charles Kennedy was in some way a political lightweight, a joke figure, and a "Chat-Show Charlie", who could never be taken seriously by the electorate and whose party therefore faced wipe-out in the recent election. We may further have given the impression that, in comparison, his predecessor Lord Pantsdown of Sarajevo was a towering giant bestriding the political scene like a colossus. Headlines such as "Ginger, You're Nuts!", "Calamity Kennedy Heads Lib Dems For Meltdown" and "Is Lib Dem Chazza Drunk and Gay? – We Do Hope So" may have conveyed to readers the idea that we were in some way critical of Mr Kennedy's abilities.

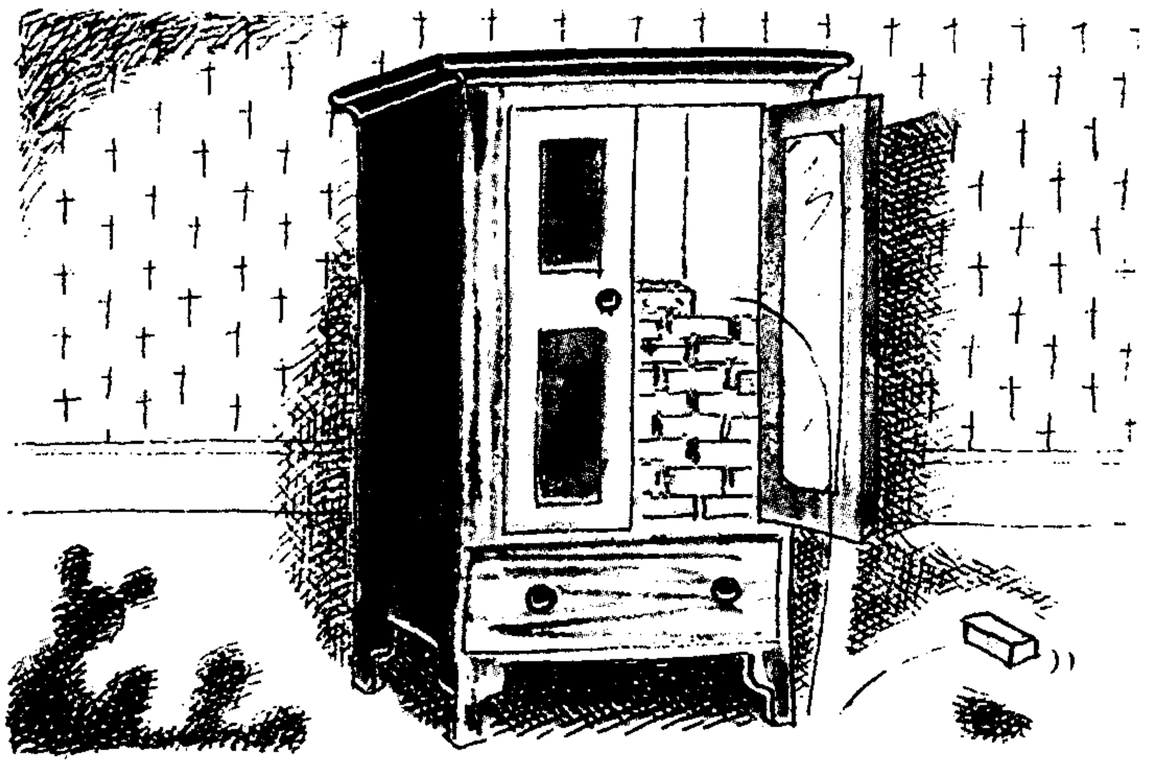
In the light of the election results, we now recognise that there was not a jot or a scintilla of truth in any of the above, and would like to make it clear that Mr Kennedy is one of the most outstanding political leaders of this or any other century, a master strategist and spellbinding orator of unequalled personal charisma, who is the greatest Liberal statesman since Lord Jenkins of Hillhead *(Surely 'Gladstone'? Ed.)*. We hope that today's headlines, such as "It's Skye-High Charlie!", "Sex-Bomb Kennedy Is The Ladies' Favourite" and "Why Is Goodtime Chazza Not At Number Ten Instead of Boring, Teetotal Blair?" will correct our earlier misleading innuendoes and we apologise for any confusion caused.

IT'S VAZ
BRITAIN'S TOP COMIC!
WHAT ABOUT THESE PROPERTY ALLEGATIONS?
PRESS
RGJ
I'm ISSUING A FLAT DENIAL... AND IT'S AVAILABLE FOR RENT!
NUDGE
You're A DISGRACE - AND YOU ARE BEING KICKED OUT OF THE HOUSE!
WHICH ONE? I'VE GOT SO MANY I'VE LOST COUNT!!
OH NO! I'VE BEEN FIRED ON HEALTH GROUNDS!

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe Full Of Gold

by C.S. Lewis (newly adapted for the 21st Century)



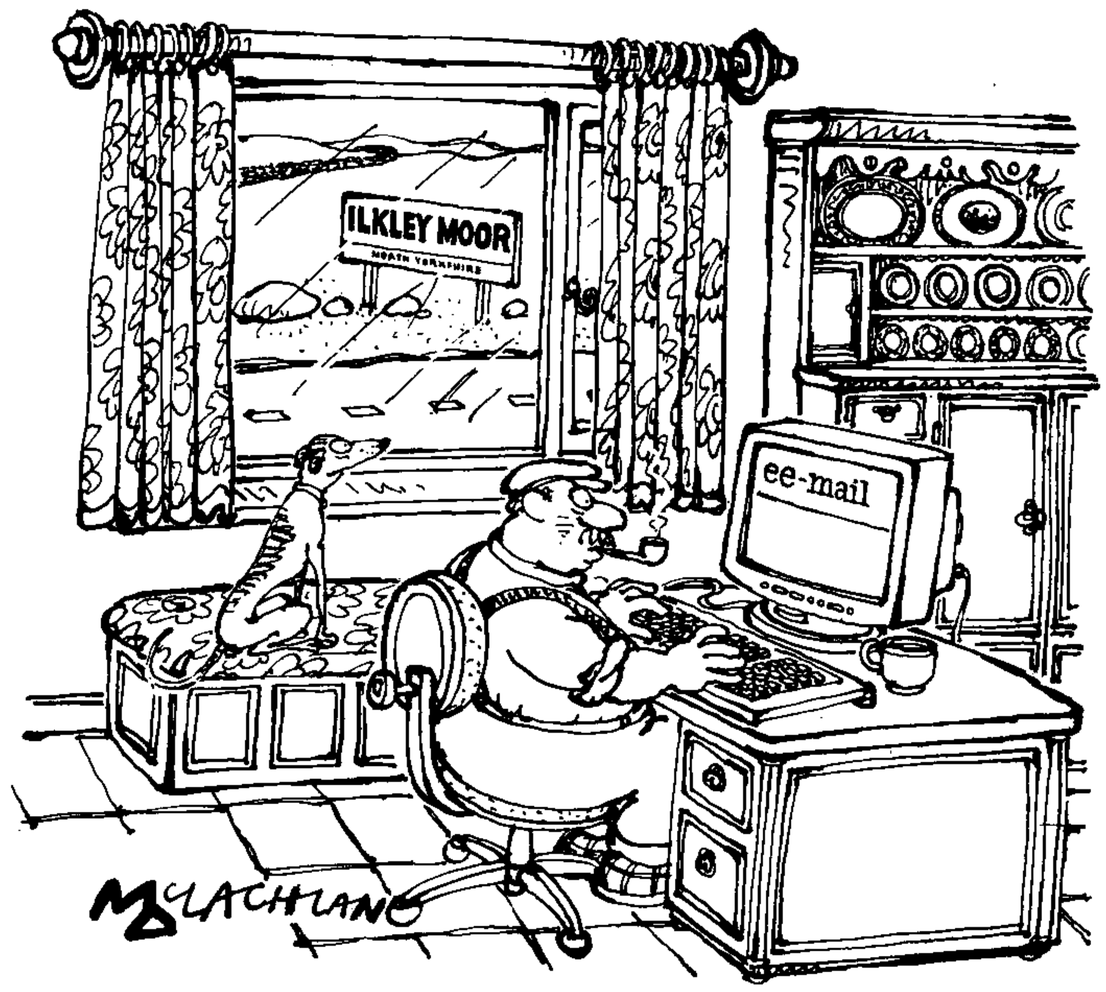
Holden after Baynes

In this exciting new adventure story, Harper and Collins are staying at their rich Uncle Murdoch's house, when they discover a mysterious wardrobe. When they open it, imagine their surprise when they find inside a pile of dusty old books.

When they show them to their uncle, he tells them that the books can be magically turned into a huge pile of gold. All they have to do is to take out all the boring Christian bits (ie, plot, characters, story) and rewrite them themselves in the style of the great Sir Walter Disney. Harper and Collins set about their task with relish, and within a few months they have become the richest people in the world (or rather Uncle Murdoch has). And so winter returned to Narnia for ever.

The former England international who also advertises Walkers crisps, under the slogan 'No more Mr Nice Gay'

ITN Web page



RAILTRACK CRASH LATEST

By Our Transport Correspondent **Cher Catastrophe**

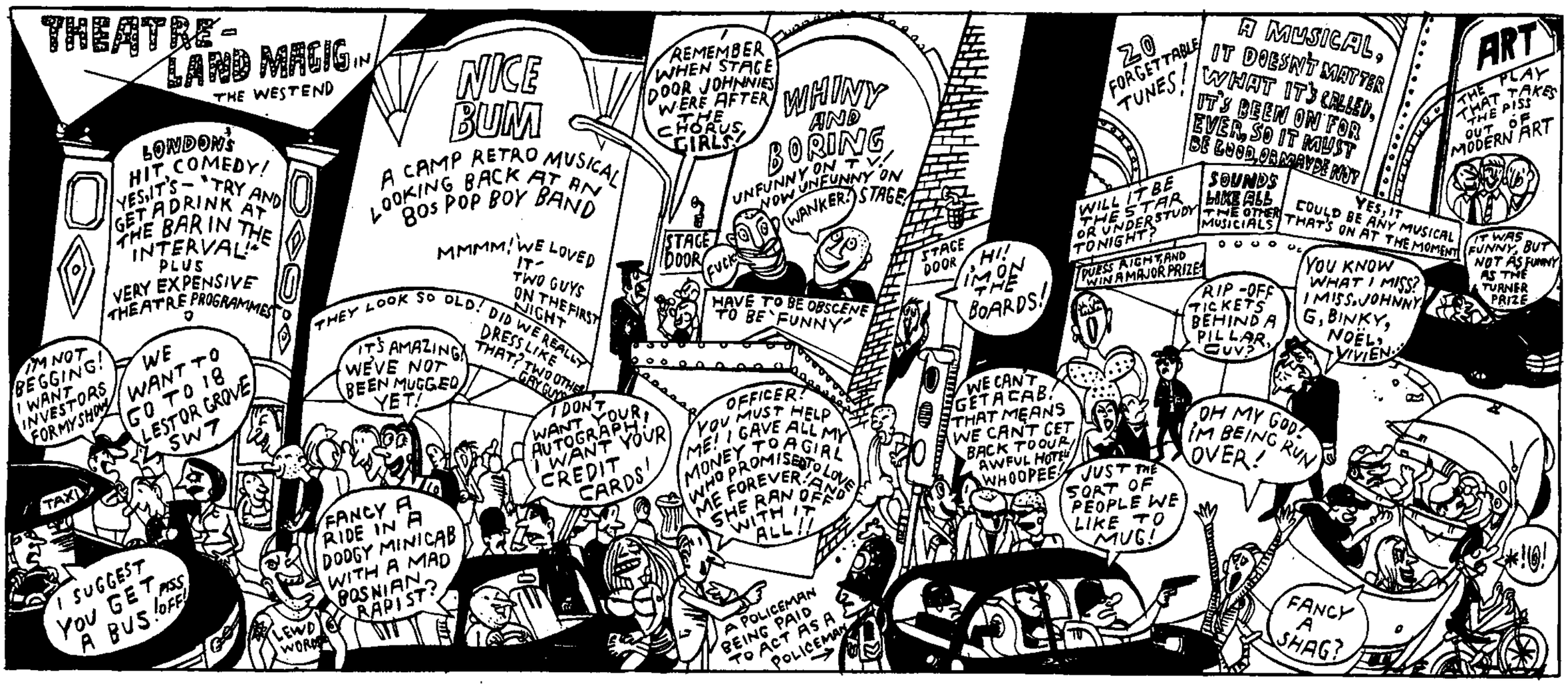
THE CITY of London was left reeling today after it was the site of an horrific crash of Railtrack shares. First stockbrokers on the scene described dazed share-holders wandering around nursing huge losses after the shares plummeted out of control.

Experts say huge cracks, known to have been found in the whole system, had been consistently ignored. Many analysts say this crash could threaten the very future of Railtrack, with disgruntled passengers opting instead for the re-nationalisation express.

A number of Railtrack company directors who stumbled from the wreckage warned that it could be months or even years before speed restrictions placed on the payment of million pound bonuses to them by these shareholders are lifted.

Railtrack shares are 45 (but yesterday they were 672).

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW


THEATRE-LAND MAGIC IN THE WESTEND
LONDON'S HIT COMEDY! YES, IT'S - "TRY AND GET A DRINK AT THE BAR IN THE INTERVAL!" PLUS VERY EXPENSIVE THEATRE PROGRAMMES
NICE BUM
A CAMP RETRO MUSICAL LOOKING BACK AT AN 80s POP BOY BAND
MMMM! WE LOVED IT- TWO GUYS ON THE FIRST NIGHT
I REMEMBER WHEN STAGE DOOR JOHNNIES WERE AFTER THE CHORUS GIRLS!
WHINY AND BORING
UNFUNNY ON TV! NOW UNFUNNY ON STAGE!
WANKER!
STAGE DOOR
FUCK
HAVE TO BE OBSCENE TO BE 'FUNNY'
HI! I'M ON THE BOARDS!
THEY LOOK SO OLD! DID WE REALLY DRESS LIKE THAT? TWO OTHER GAY GUYS
IT'S AMAZING! WE'VE NOT BEEN MUGGED YET!
I DON'T WANT YOUR AUTOGRAPH! I WANT YOUR CREDIT CARDS!
OFFICER! YOU MUST HELP ME! I GAVE ALL MY MONEY TO A GIRL WHO PROMISED TO LOVE ME FOREVER! AND SHE RAN OFF WITH IT ALL!!
A POLICEMAN BEING PAID TO ACT AS A POLICEMAN
I'M NOT BEGGING! I WANT INVESTORS FOR MY SHOW
WE WANT TO GO TO 18 LESTOR GROVE SW7
TAXI
I SUGGEST YOU GET A BUS! PISS OFF!
FANCY A RIDE IN A DODGY MINICAB WITH A MAD BOSNIAN RAPIST?
LEWD WORDS
20 FORGETTABLE TUNES!
A MUSICAL, IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT IT'S CALLED, IT'S BEEN ON FOR EVER, SO IT MUST BE GOOD, OR MAYBE NOT
ART
THE PLAY THAT TAKES THE PISS OUT OF MODERN ART
WILL IT BE THE STAR OR UNDERSTUDY TONIGHT?
SOUNDS LIKE ALL THE OTHER MUSICALS
YES, IT COULD BE ANY MUSICAL THAT'S ON AT THE MOMENT
IT WAS FUNNY, BUT NOT AS FUNNY AS THE TURNER PRIZE
GUESS RIGHT, AND WIN A MAJOR PRIZE!
RIP-OFF TICKETS BEHIND A PILLAR, GUV?
YOU KNOW WHAT I MISS? I MISS JOHNNY G, BINKY, NOËL, VIVIEN...
WE CAN'T GET A CAB. THAT MEANS WE CAN'T GET BACK TO OUR AWFUL HOTEL! WHOOPEE!
OH MY GOD! I'M BEING RUN OVER!
JUST THE SORT OF PEOPLE WE LIKE TO MUG!
FANCY A SHAG?
*!@!

DIARY

Dumas is in gaol, Sirven is in custody, Fujimori has fallen, Clinton is history. In the Middle East, the Two Tribes, as Frankie Goes To Hollywood so ably put it in their ground-breaking, jaw-dropping, chase-cut-to-ing, literally-all-consuming, heart-melting, head-banging song of the same name, Go To War.

The world is at present in one of its perennial hey-what-the-hell's-happening-guys states. And, believe me, it's not a pretty sight. But there's one guy, one god, one good god-guy who's above it all. One guy whose word the world trusts, and in whose trust the world trusts its words. One guy who has our best interests at heart.

And the name of that guy?

Bono.

Bono – Magician, Master, Storyteller, Soothsayer, Wizard, Artist. Troubadour...

Yeah.

I first met Bono backstage on U2's Getting to Grips with World Debt Baby tour at Wembley. I was sitting in a room backstage when he just walked in, *just walked in*, alone and unescorted, just like an ordinary guy, without any of that hey-man-I'm-a-world-megastar step-swagger.

I told him straightaway how much I had deeply appreciated the band's literally superb *Dull Moans for a New Millennium* album, and that I was still in total and absolute knocked-sideways mode having just literally succumbed to the magical complexities of their seminal *Wailing Away* commemorative boxed set.

Then Bono – *Bono!* – and I talked of what was going on in different parts of the world, and what wasn't going on, and how we both wanted to incorporate the whole of what was and what wasn't going on in our novels and CDs in such a way – impactful, insightful, non-pedestrian but above all poeticalish – as to bring the world – the whole of it, and the whole of not-it – literally to its senses.

We rapped into the night, me and Bono – the novelist and the rock star, the rock star and the novelist – the unacknowledged legislators, as T. S. Eliot put it in times-less-turbulent – of the world. And not only the world: *the Universe.*

SALMAN RUSHDIE ON BONO

We discovered we had a lot in common. Bono is a guy of courage and bravery and another synonym who likes to cross frontiers and break down barriers. And I've been crossing frontiers all my life – physical, social, intellectual, artistic borderlines – and I spotted, in Bono and the Edge, the mind-blowingly powerful drummer the Arse and their brilliant bassist Kattomeat an equal hunger – a thirst, even – for the new, for whatever nourishes, for whatever is dangerous and delicious, for whatever can be eaten between meals without ruining the appetite.

An association with U2 is good for one's anecdote stock. Some of these anecdotes are risibly apocryphal and I wish to avail myself of this undoubted opportunity to see them corrected by a free (yeah, right) press. I never, for instance, said that my favourite track on U2's monumental *"Beneath the Drone"* set was *"Dreary Is The Song (Homage to Sarajevo)"*. In truth – not a commodity of which the press regrettably has a surfeit of too much, in my view – that particular track was only my second favourite, my favourite being *"Fire of Hope for a New Thing-Style Experience (Module for World Destiny No. 1)"*. But when has the press ever bothered to correct important facts is the question I am now asking?

But some anecdotes that sound apocryphal are – unfortunately! – true. For example, I did meet Van Morrison in Bono's living room and, yes, I did pogo along with the best of them to the new Stewed Prunes CD, and, yes, I have to admit it, I did sit up all night in Bono's 30-bedroom guest lodgings in Killiney – with the odd bottle of Jameson's Irish Whiskey to my credit! – discussing international poverty with internationally-regarded film directors Neil Jordan and Wim Wenders, world-class international supermodel Naomi Campbell, that fine, easily underestimated actor Sylvester Stallone, and U2's consummate horn-player and all-round good guy, Whiskas.

So how did the event happen that I came to write the lyrics for a U2 track? Well, it happened, like many things happen, without being planned. By chance, in other words. Or quite by accident, in other other words. Not deliberately. Without forethought.

In the late 1990s, I was writing a novel about the mythic world of rock 'n' roll (yeah, you better believe it, baby!) called *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. I was about halfway through this Olympian enterprise when I realised with a start that "feet" rhymed with "meet" and "beat". Over a tortuous, tortured few days, I made the chance discovery that "feel" rhymes with "real", and "true" rhymes with "you".

Yes, I had come up with a ground-breaking lyric of almost mythical intensity which, like all the best rock, had the power to literally move mountains.

I immediately felt that it was my duty as an artist and inveterate front-crosser to send it to Bono. Bono called me. "I've written this melody for your words. I think it might be one of the best things I've ever done." I was both astonished and even more than just astonished – simultaneously astonished and *truly astonished.*

Now U2 have moved beyond their multi-media self-consciousness embrace-debunk post-mythology phase, they are performing more sparely than ever, and their Ennervation Tour is, for me, their most intensely and profoundly impressive yet, reminiscent of their 1989 Portfolio Consolidation tour, but with an even more resonant and haunting undertow of fiscal prudence.

And they're playing my song.

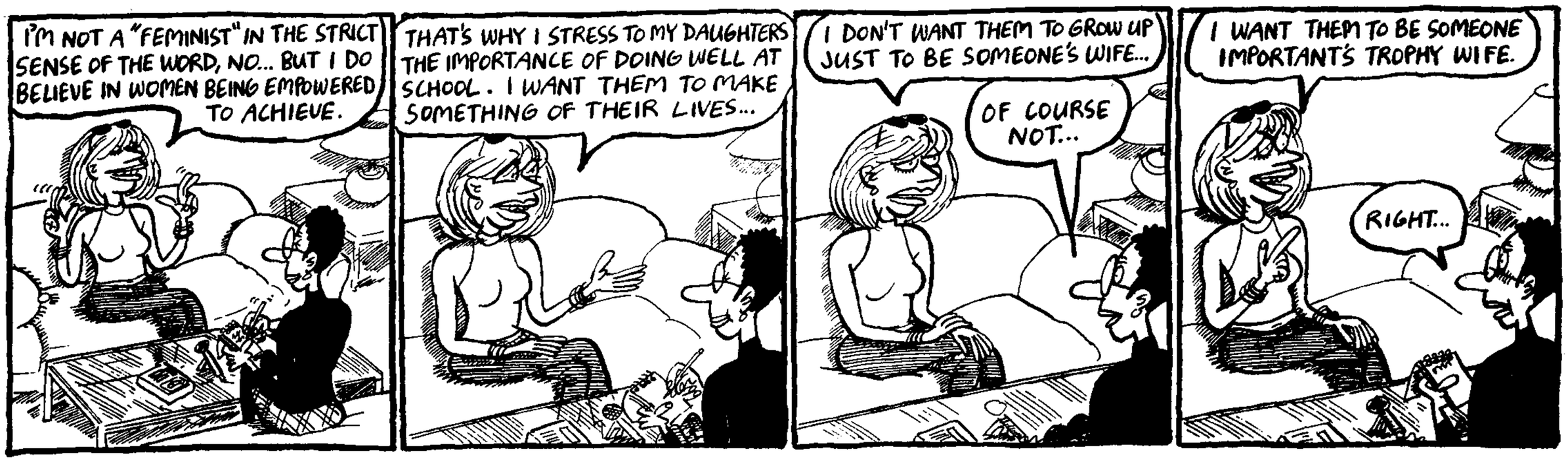
And, at last, the finger of hope reaches out to the world.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


I'M NOT A "FEMINIST" IN THE STRICT SENSE OF THE WORD, NO... BUT I DO BELIEVE IN WOMEN BEING EMPOWERED TO ACHIEVE.
THAT'S WHY I STRESS TO MY DAUGHTERS THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING WELL AT SCHOOL. I WANT THEM TO MAKE SOMETHING OF THEIR LIVES...
I DON'T WANT THEM TO GROW UP JUST TO BE SOMEONE'S WIFE...
OF COURSE NOT...
I WANT THEM TO BE SOMEONE IMPORTANT'S TROPHY WIFE.
RIGHT...

Literary Review

Old Cope?

If I Don't Know
Wendy Cope
(Faber and Faber, £8.99)

WENDY COPE's 1986 debut, *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis*, is one of modern poetry's few bestsellers, a collection of literary pastiches that proved Cope an able ventriloquist, if a one-trick pony: her stock joke was to trot along for a line or two mimicking the style of a Wordsworth, an Eliot or a Dickinson, before a sudden descent from the high style to the low provided the punchline. Something like "Whilst pondering my dear departed/I farted." Middle England tittered into their risotto and publishers Faber and Faber cleared up.

No, not a misprint: Wendy is a Faber poet, part of an esteemed list that at one time virtually defined 20th-century poetry and had as its founding editor none other than T.S. Eliot. Quite what TS would think of Cope's verse-lite it's hard to imagine ("Let us go then, you and I.../and shoot ourselves") but Faber needs cash like any other publisher, and Wendy's winsome ditties certainly help to bankroll Thom Gunn, Douglas Dunn and all the proper *literateurs* in their more highfalutin' flights of fancy.

Fifteen years have passed since *Making...* appeared, during which time Wendy has edited anthologies of "humorous" verse and composed more rhyming quippery for Cope-heads to half-laugh at. No one can begrudge Wendy her place at the vanguard of light verse. But whilst *If I Don't Know* contains a smattering of the Cope we know and love (such as a Haiku written without her glasses on: "What's that amazing/new lemon-yellow flower?/Oh yes, a football.") in this short volume, Wendy has decided she is a serious poet. As a result it's her most hilarious work yet.

Cope is popular because she's simple. No delicate exegesis required for a poem called "Being Boring" that concludes "I aspire/To go on and on being boring". There are two ways of looking at this. Either you say "simple" means obvious and therefore trite, or you cast "simple" as lucid, pithy and therefore profound. When Wendy was just funny her simplicity could be forgiven as a means to a good one-liner, but now that she's trying for status it's revealed as a lack of any discernible interesting thought.

But come on... this isn't fair: Wendy Cope's such a nice name, after all, and she never claimed to be Shakespeare. Actually it is fair because *If I Don't Know* comes with a sly subtext: in between tales of white wine, begonias and some uproarious descriptions of types of prize county pigs, Wendy is having a pop at horrible old po-faced "proper" poetry. "A Poem on the Theme of Humour" says sarcastically "if humour is allowed into a poem,/People may laugh and enjoy it,/Which gives the poet an unfair advantage."

The next stanza finds Wendy aiming a sideswipe at Dannie Abse, saying that as chairman of a panel of judges she hopes he "will be rigorous in disqualifying any poem/That raises so much as a smile."

Okay, so let's talk a little about humour in poetry. One, Cope's pronouncements kind of presume she's got it. On the evidence of *If I Don't Know* this is questionable. Two, confusing laughing with enjoyment is a fallacy: you can enjoy things that aren't funny, with the history of tragedy being one small example. And three, Wendy's argument that poetry needs to lighten up in order to regain popular interest is sunk by the fact that in this particular volume, she's decided to go all heavy: the latter half of this collection consists of a single torturous 700-liner (in heroic couplets, no less), telling the tale of a troubled child. The contents, meaning and message of said 700 lines can be paraphrased in just two: "They fuck you up/your Mum and Dad" as someone once said.

Wendy is at her most palatable when she does the Pam Ayers-but-from-Kent thing and steers clear of weighty meaning of life perorations. Thus, her poem about losing socks in the wash is readable, whereas her forays into pastoral are chocolate-box at best — "The bridge is slippery, the grass so sodden/That water seeps into my shoes" — and her stabs at elegy are sub-Paul McCartney. Even her burlesques of every poetic form you'd forgotten — from villanelle to triolet — are becoming tiresome. They're supposed to show off her erudition and formal skills but after 10 or 20 of them wandering minds might begin to recall that reworking fixed forms for comic effect was a mainstay of late 19th century *vers de societé*: light, inconsequential after-dinner patter that, for that very reason, has been largely forgotten.

Books & Bookmen

■ IN ANOTHER triumph for Murdoch-inspired philistinism, HarperCollins has struck a deal with the C.S. Lewis estate to "develop new books" based on the Chronicles of Narnia — but without the Christian imagery, or anything else that might complicate the story and harm the merchandising opportunities.

The rebranding has been defended by Lewis's stepson and executor, Douglas Gresham. "What is wrong with trying to get people outside of Christianity to read the Narnia chronicles?" he asks, apparently unaware that countless non-Christians have already managed to enjoy the books without the assistance of the Dirty Digger's ghost-writers.

Clearly this cannot be the same Douglas Gresham who in 1998 was approached by Michel Faber, the Whitbread-shortlisted novelist, who wished to publish a short story, probably in a small literary magazine, exploring the fate of the Narnia character Susan Pevensie. "The policy [of the Lewis estate] is that no sequels or new Narnian chronicle stories will be permitted to be published," Gresham wrote back. "There are many reasons for this but the most important is that Jack [ie Lewis] himself told me that there should be no more of them and so I made that recommendation to the company which adopted it as policy. He said that all that should be said about Narnia had been said and there was an end of it... Incidentally, it does seem to me amazingly arrogant for writers to assume that they can write well enough for their efforts to be added to the published canon of Narnian works by C.S. Lewis." He concluded by threatening legal action if any attempt was made to publish.

Gresham was prepared to sue a respected writer of literary fiction who stood to make little or no money from a story aimed at adults. Yet he is about to earn a fortune from made-to-order children's books which go against Lewis's express wishes. Shome mishtake, shurely?

■ WHAT is Little, Brown planning for Michael Bloch's long-awaited biography of Jeremy Thorpe?

The book was commissioned by Transworld aeons ago, and the publisher always swore it would never be published in Thorpe's lifetime. When Ursula McKenzie left Transworld for Little Brown Jug, Bloch was one of the authors she took with her. Now, it seems that a significant part of the manuscript has been delivered to LB and typeset. Is the publisher planning to go back on the old Transworld pledge and bring it out while Thorpe is still around to see it? Or is it preparing it for rush publication the moment the old poodlefaker, gravely ill with Parkinson's Disease, departs these shores?

Time alone will tell. Until then Thorpe enthusiasts must amuse themselves with his own ragbag of reminiscences — *In My Own Time* (Politico's Publishing) — which glosses over the Norman Scott/Rinka affair but contains fascinating, hitherto unpublished material about childhood encounters with David Lloyd George and Thorpe family pets with grievous wind problems.

"You couldn't pick it up"

■ DOES ageing mullet-wearer John Blake know what he's letting himself in for with the purchase of Metro, now that he has overcome the Inland Revenue's final objections to the sale?

Buying £1.5m of tax losses for £25,000 and giving Metro's creditors 25 percent of what they're owed may work out neatly on paper, but there is one huge snag. The creditors' list, as issued by Harrisons, the Reading-based insolvency specialists enlisted by Metro, is far from complete.

Justifiable claims for several further significant debts have been lodged since publication of the list, and more are expected. In addition quite a few creditors — including authors such as Al Alvarez and Dr Raj Persaud as well as agent Ed Victor — have seen their *debts* listed at a nominal £1 each, when many of them are owed rather more. Could Flakey Blakey end up out of pocket and saddled with an imprint no one trusts?

Meanwhile creditors are hoping that in addition to receiving some cash they will see the Department of Timidity and Inaction follow through its threat to investigate the architects of Metro's decline, Susanne McDadd and Charles Lumsden.

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT'S VITAL WE REMEMBER WHAT THE BOOKS ARE ALL ABOUT...
HARPER COLLINS
ALL NEW NARNIA CHRONICLES
- MAKING MONEY!
HARPER COLLINS
NICE ONE!
ALL NEW NARNIA CHRONICLES
DUMP THE CHRISTIAN STUFF AND WHACK 'EM OUT!

■ THE Waterstone's saga drags on, with rumours that James Heneage, proprietor of Ottakar's, is interested in buying his rival. He denies it hotly — and it would appear that he is telling the truth.

Having only just got his own business back on track after a difficult 2000, it is hard to see why Heneage would want to take on a debt-laden, under-performing behemoth like Waterstone's. Also, the Ottakar's way has historically been one of gentle expansion — a few new branches a year and the odd takeover of an independent. However, with the *Times* mentioning a price of £190m, perhaps even the prudent Heneage could be tempted, considering that HMV Media wanted £300m for the shops a year ago, and in February refused to sell them to Tim Waterstone for £200m, presumably in a fit of pique.

Meanwhile piles of *Waterstone's Books Quarterly* (see last *Eye*) remain unsold in various branches. It is telling of the way in which HMV regards the different customers of its various operations that Waterstone's punters are expected to cough up £2 (or spend £20 on books and receive a "free" copy) for the privilege of being puffed at, while the equivalent publication for the HMV music stores is, quite rightly, a freebie.

'Bookworm'

What You Didn't Miss, Pt 94

Moralities by Joan Smith

Very short sentences

Scandal is in the air. The tumbrils are rolling. Clichés flock like fish to the bait. Trial by tabloid is a daily event. No one is safe. Puritanism is back.

Hang on a minute

Popular as this theory is — usually advanced by men — it collapses under scrutiny. Beddings don't mean weddings. Gay's the word. Sisters are doing it for themselves. What's going on?

A slightly longer bit

Is there a book in this? My publisher seems to think so. I am aware that what I am proposing may seem counter-intuitive. Freud and Nietzsche would doubtless agree. But change is in the air. Did I say that before? Time to stop for a breather.

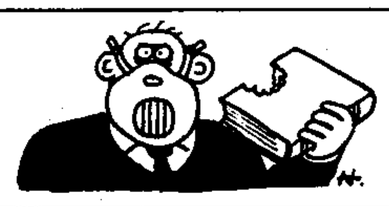
In case you can't be bothered to read any further

This book tackles big themes, and for this reason I have adopted a somewhat unconventional structure. In chapter 1 I analyse the deep moral repugnance of that old bastard General Pinochet. This is followed by a sober examination of President Clinton's pursuit of sexual favours from women. Men also feature strongly in chapters 3, 4 and 5, along with God, hypocrisy and globalisation.

It really is starting now

It was Germaine Greer, writing about the colourful and unexpected explosion of anger at the Seattle summit of the World Trade Organisation, who remarked that the Eurobond is a phallus by another name. This is a decisive break in history, which... *(continues)*

Hannibal Lecteur



"/9/>/I/J/K/L/Q/R/{/}/444. 14 34 74 U4," argues James Kelman in Chapter 5 of his new novel *Translated Accounts* — and to judge by the reviews, the rest is scarcely more comprehensible. But Kelman is a serious, grown-up Booker Prize winner, so critics have turned themselves inside out to try to find positive things to say about a book which is clearly reader-proof.

"The typographical hieroglyphics in Chapter 5 seem a bit pointless," Katie Grant bravely pointed out in the *Spectator*; but then "Kelman has got something to say; it is just that it is not pleasant, and the way he says it sometimes gets in the way." This subtle approach — it's brilliant, even if it's completely incomprehensible — appealed to several other critics.

"All that can be said of it is that Kelman's integrity as a writer remains intact; but, in the absence of repeated readings required to establish what the hell is going on here, a final judgement hangs out of reach," wrote an exhausted DJ Taylor in the *Literary Review*. Similarly desperate, Keith Miller waffled away in the *TLS*: "We can safely impute a degree of high-mindedness to *Translated Accounts*; that is, we can ask ourselves what Kelman is trying to do in it, on the supposition that he is at least trying to do something."

In the *Sunday Times*, Sean O'Brien was having none of this wimpishness. Reading the book "involves a certain commitment," he conceded, but modernist fiction of this kind "reminds us that fiction can be more than parochial, more than glamorous literary noise, more than journalism."

A minority or reviewers gave up and were prepared to admit it. "Kelman has moved on to a language nobody speaks," wrote James Campbell in the *Guardian* while, the *Sunday Telegraph's* David Robson, declared *Translated Accounts* "by a landslide, the most unreadable novel I have ever had to wade my way through."

By contrast, Richard Littlejohn has been taking a robustly populist stance while plugging his first novel *To Hell in Handcart*. "Like *Bonfire of the Vanities* meets *Minder*" was the way he summarised in one pre-publication interview. "I'm expecting it to get slaughtered by lots of people who probably won't read it. But who gives a fuck?"

Of course, being a journalist he has been given a gentle ride. "The most Right-wing novel I have ever read," was Andrew Roberts's approving verdict in the *Mail on Sunday*. "There is something to make you smile on every page." In the *Sunday Telegraph*, Charles Spencer provided an example of one of these quips — the hero lives in Heffer's Bottom, a hilarious reference to Littlejohn's fellow-columnist Simon Heffer — before concluding that "the author's intemperance is splendidly bracing."

Meanwhile the pre-publication hype for Elaine Dundy's memoir *Life Itself!* has concentrated, predictably enough, on her first husband Kenneth Tynan's well-documented penchant for thrashing women with a cane. "Shall we open up the old S and M?" she chirpily asked Duncan Campbell in the *Observer*, but then oddly complained that the publishers of Tynan's forthcoming diaries "intend to sell this book of his on S and M."

Not that she, nor her impeccably feminist publishers Virago, would ever dream of doing such a thing themselves.

Pseuds Corner

The expression on [Kevin] Keegan's face is jolting. It is in the eyes, a sadness that no amount of fist-clenching and arm-waving can disguise.

The sadness has been there since Newcastle lost a 12-point lead and a Premiership title. Up till then there had been an aura about Keegan, a sense that come what may, the force of his will would transcend everything. His team lost a championship and he lost more. Art Garfunkel wrote about this in his song, Bright Eyes:

Bright eyes,
Burning like fire,
Bright eyes,
How can you close and fail?
How can the light that burned so brightly
Suddenly burn so pale?

But football is a street where every second building is a last chance saloon...

DAVID WALSH
Sunday Times

The colour of snow
The taste of tears
The enormity of Oceans

Found on a packet of complimentary salt provided by SAS Airlines

Dido was named after the Queen of Carthage in Virgil's Aeneid. At home, at school, to her family and friends, she has always been Dido, just as her brother has always been Rollo. On her birth certificate, however, her name is Florian Cloud De Bounevialle Armstrong.

Observer

[Amanda] Harlech's role at Chanel means she has to spend part of her time living, as Coco Chanel did, in a suite at the Ritz Hotel in Paris. So, when she returns to her family home in

Shropshire, it's a chance to completely relax. She gets her hair cut at Nicky Mitchell in Chester, has back manipulation from horse chiropractor Mark Windsor and visits her herbalist Nicky Jevon who concocts creams and essential-oil blends for her and her teenage children, Tallulah and Jassett.

Nova

Paxman was acclaimed for his journalistic talent, encyclopaedic knowledge, his subtle sense of paradox and genuine commitment. He received enthusiastic praise for his ability to make his own persona invisible. The fact that he had managed to distance himself from his theme, that he never imposed his own ideas and beliefs, provoked a stimulating debate both in electronic media and the printed press on the visibility of the writer's position.

***Literature Matters*, newsletter of the British Council's Literature Department, reporting Jeremy Paxman's visit to Bulgaria**

There are no half-formed experiments or slim ideas worked up at soundchecks here [in R.E.M.'s Reveal*], just 12 highly wrought songs with intriguing lyrics... and tunes whose beauty unfolds slowly over several listens, like flower-heads teased gently open by the sun's rays before bestowing their full glory on the world.*

ANDY GILL
Independent

CONTRIBUTORS: Andrew Morris, Matthew Wiltshire, Edward Lindsay, Amelia Fairney, David Rose, Rael Martell.

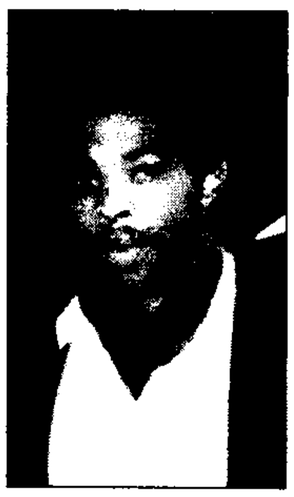
£10 paid for entries

IN THE BACK

Alton Manning: WHY WON'T THE DPP PROSECUTE?

AFTER six gruelling years, does Alton Manning's family have the strength to return to the high court to challenge – yet again – the director of public prosecution's (DPP) latest extraordinary decision not to prosecute any prison officer involved in Alton's "unlawful" death in Blakenhurst private prison?

Eye readers will recall that the 33-year-old remand prisoner died in December 1995 in a struggle with officers. An inquest jury returned a verdict of "unlawful killing"; and Richard Tilt, then director of the prison service, was forced to apologise after he sought to excuse the death by bizarrely suggesting "physiological" differences meant black people were more vulnerable to suffocating while being restrained by his staff.



Alton Manning

Last year Lord Bingham, then lord chief justice, told the DPP, David Calvert-Smith, that his earlier "surprising" decision not to prosecute officers was flawed and ordered him to review the case. He said that where there was an inquest verdict of unlawful killing against identifiable "agents of the state" and an expectation of a prosecution, the DPP was obliged to show he had "solid grounds" for not bringing a case to court.

Yet in its decision last week not to bring charges, the crown prosecution service (CPS), on behalf of Calvert-Smith, appears merely to have trotted out the same old reasons that were rejected by one judicial review hearing and by the inquest jury itself. That is that it was impossible to say what act, committed by whom and when, caused Alton Manning's death.

This argument first surfaced when the prison service, UK Detention Services, the security company running the jail and the home office went to the high court before the conclusion of the 1998 inquest in a failed bid to stop the Kidderminster coroner from allowing the inquest jury to consider the verdict of "unlawful killing" to be put before the inquest jury.

The high court threw out their application and the jury duly returned their damning verdict: Alton Manning had died as a result of a neck-hold applied by an officer in an unlawful and dangerous restraint. In reaching their decision, the jurors also clearly rejected prison officer accounts that at no time was Manning held in a neck-lock. The coroner referred the case back to the DPP, suggesting "the death was likely to be due to an offence and that the prison officer or officers concerned might be charged".

But in February of the next year, then more than three years after the death, Calvert-Smith said again that no one would face charges. This prompted the Manning family to turn to the courts. This time the CPS line was that although there was an officer who could be identified as having held Manning in a neck-lock, it may be that contact with his neck might have been "accidental and not continuous" – the result of attempts to secure proper restraint.

However, Lord Bingham pointed out that there was no evidence to suggest accidental contact and that, anyway, that possibility had been directly contradicted by the officer himself in evidence to the inquest.

Last week's decision by Calvert-Smith's office, six and a half years down the line, appears to have brought the case full circle and is described by Raju Bhatt, the family's lawyer, as pure *Alice in Wonderland*.

"After all these years and the intervening scrutiny by the courts, the CPS remain unable to find good reasons to justify their continuing refusal to prosecute in this case. There are clear grounds for challenge by way of a further application for judicial review. The family will consider all options available to them, mindful that this has become a war of attrition which has already had an enormous toll on them," said Bhatt.

But the family may yet have the last word. The police complaints authority (PCA) inquiry into West Mercia police's handling of the investigation into Manning's death is due to report shortly. It may yet show how the failure of the CPS and Calvert Smith in this case is only one part of a larger institutional failure within the criminal justice system to uphold the rule of law when those accused of wrongdoing are police or prison officers.

ABUSING THE ABUSED

WOMEN victims of rape or sexual abuse should be warned that their terrible experiences may be used against them in our justice system – even following something as unrelated as a car accident.

The *Eye* has been told of two cases where car crash victims, suing for damages in the civil courts, have faced lengthy and detailed cross-examination about assault and abuse they had suffered years earlier.

In both cases it seems the defendant insurance companies had learnt about the women's dreadful sexual history by trawling through their medical notes. In one case, a women was cross-examined about sexual abuse she had suffered as a child – the speculative suggestion being that she had exaggerated the abuse and was thus capable of exaggerating her crash injuries.

In the second case the woman crash victim, suing for whiplash injuries, was cross-examined for two mornings about a rape which had taken place 17 years earlier. Like many rape victims she had not gone to the police but had told her doctor. The rape was again used as a method of determining if the victim was a truthful and creditable witness – even though without the evidence of a criminal trial it could not possibly reach any conclusions about the rape.

The 38-year-old woman, supported by Women Against Rape, complained formally to lord chancellor Lord Irvine about the judge's decision to allow the prolonged questioning. She suggested she had been deprived of a fair hearing by this "unacceptable" use of her medical records, and had been "humiliated and embarrassed" as her employers and others who knew nothing of her past were in court.

Irvine rejected her complaint saying the decision over whether or not to admit that line of questioning in an apparently unrelated matter was a matter for the trial judge's discretion. But he did, however, decide that the judge, Recorder Andrew Mitchell QC, should have his knuckles rapped for insensitivity in talking about the woman "playing the rape card" in the case.

Campaigners want the law changed and the victim is hoping that a challenge in the European courts and human rights legislation which guarantees the right to a fair hearing and the right to respect for private and family life might persuade Irvine to change his mind.

THE LAW 'N' DISORDER LOBBY

FROM 19 to 22 June a heady mix of business executives and top politicians will be in Edinburgh to attend a conference on threats to international law and order like the "trafficking of illicit commodities", "corruption", "disruption by protest and pressure groups" and "violence & disorder on the streets".

The speakers include the former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Nato secretary-general and former Labour defence minister Lord (George) Robertson and John Abbott, director-general of the National Criminal Intelligence Service.

Tony Blair has already sent a message to the conference offering his "full support" and telling delegates that "we are facing new and growing threats which are challenging not only our national ways of life but also the greater international order. While globalisation and technology are combining to bring increased prosperity to many, they are also enabling darker forces to assemble which undermine law, order and stability."

Somehow he has failed to notice the surprisingly high number of law-breaking private firms that will be represented at the conference.

The speakers will include Neil Withington, British American Tobacco's legal director. BAT is sponsoring the conference – and is of course the same BAT that was accused of encouraging tobacco smuggling and massive tax evasion at the end of last year.

Since 1997 three BAT managers have either pleaded guilty to or been convicted of charges related to tobacco smuggling. The company claims these were "rogue" operations but an exhaustive analysis of internal documents suggests that encouragement of smuggling went to the top of the firm.

Another corporate lawbreaker is represented by Nick Butler, BP's group policy adviser and a key "new" Labour insider. The conference claims to be dealing with "corruption", yet at the beginning of January BP vice president Reg Hinckley told shocked British MPs that his firm regularly pays "facilitating payments" to politicians and officials.

Late last year BP paid the US government $32m to settle its part in a court case alleging "a nationwide conspiracy by some of the world's largest oil companies to short-change the United States of America of hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues". BP settled the case to avoid going to court on charges that it was deliberately cheating the US out of revenues to be paid for oil drilled on government land, by falsifying the value and quality of oil drilled.

BP was also in the dock in February when the firm's Alaska subsidiary was fined $500,000 for failing to report the illegal disposal of hazardous waste. Last July BP/Amoco agreed to pay $10m to settle a clean air act case.

Tim Spicer, latterly of mercenary outfit Sandline, is also set to lecture on law and order at the Edinburgh conference. Spicer's arrangement of shipments of arms into Sierra Leone broke UN embargoes and caused a minor crisis for the "new" Labour government. His previous mission to fight rebels out of an area mined by Rio Tinto's subsidiary in Papua New Guinea led to street disturbances and his temporary jailing.

Frank Jones, executive vice-president of computer firm SEMA, a co-sponsor of the conference, is also set to speak. Last year another SEMA director, Hartmut Lademacher, sold £24m of his personal shares in Sema a week before the firm announced poor half-yearly results. Directors are banned from dealing in their own firm's shares in the two months before such results are announced. Lademacher resigned, but his actions and a profits warning sent share prices into meltdown, and in April SEMA was taken over by Schlumberger.

Oh, and conference organiser Spearhead put on the major Defence Systems and Equipment International (DSEi) arms fair at London's Docklands last year when one of the exhibitors, Romtechnica, was found advertising illegal mines.

THE COMPLETE AND UTTER BAIRSTOW

SAD tidings concerning the *Eye*'s old chum John Bairstow, the modest Essex plutocrat known in the manor of Brentwood as "King John".

Followers of the King – a former friend of Sir James Goldsmith – will know that he has had more than a spot of bother following his reign as chairman and joint managing director of the Queens Moat Houses hotel chain. First there was that monumental legal case after the company's collapse which decided Mr Bairstow and others should pay back £26.7m in wrongly paid dividends. Now, Mr Bairstow's appeal against this outrageous ruling has just been heard. Instead of paying back £26.7m, the King and his courtiers have been told to pay back £78m and all costs! Frankly, it couldn't have happened to a nicer man...

QMH started promisingly in 1967 when Bairstow, a partner in the successful estate agent Bairstow Eve, converted his home, The Moathouse, into a hotel. QMH became one of the fastest-growing business enterprises of the next two decades. By 1990 Bairstow was earning £341,000 plus dividends as chairman and joint managing director of QMH. Fellow joint managing director Martin Marcus struggled by on just £316,000 a year.

Like so many rich entrepreneurs of the time, Bairstow and Marcus believed the then chancellor of the exchequer Nigel Lawson when he boasted that he and prime minister Thatcher had guided British business into a "virtuous circle" of permanent growth. Queens Moat Houses borrowed prodigiously and by 1991 had a debt of £1.3bn against cash in hand of £381m.

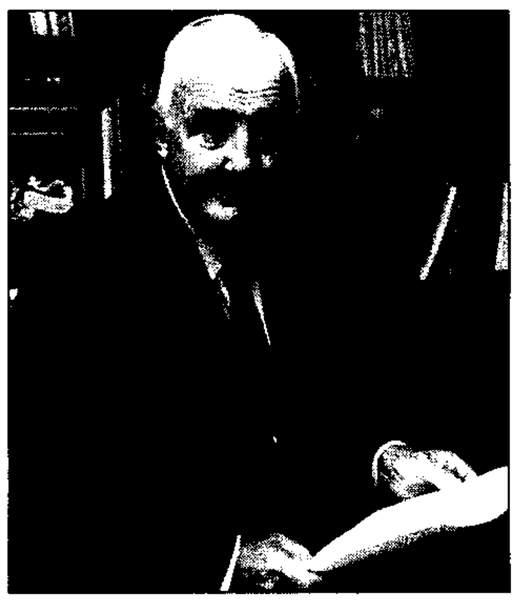
Perhaps because of their sensitive appointment to the QMH board of a former Thatcher cabinet minister, Lord Howell, Bairstow and Co were quite unprepared for the Thatcher-Lawson recession, which rapidly reduced their sprawling business to ashes. The reaction of both men was to seek to hide the facts of the company's distress by energetically and imaginatively cooking the books.

A glorious scam, appropriately nicknamed the "nice try" scheme (making an allegedly "capital payment" to managers at the rate of £15,000 per hotel bedroom and then reclaiming the payments back again as "income"), was used to credit the company with £44.8m profit it had never made. At the same time Bairstow and Marcus sought to increase their own and other directors' pensions by lumping in bonuses to which their pensions were not entitled.

The plight of the company in no way affected their habit of plundering it for benefits in kind. Mr and Mrs Bairstow flew first class to Singapore to indulge in a luxurious Christmas cruise at the expense of the company. The company continued to pay substantial salaries to two men to look after stretches of prime fishing rivers and guard them from poachers.

FULL MARCUS

The whole rickety edifice collapsed in 1993 soon after Mr Marcus cashed in 1.1m of his shares. Shares were suspended and the whole company hit the rocks. Bairstow, Marcus and Co were sacked and new managers tried to salvage something from the wreckage. The new directors were rather surprised when Mr Bairstow and Mr Marcus then sued them for wrongful dismissal and pension rights. In reply, the company sued Bairstow, Marcus and two other former directors for unlawful dividends paid out in 1990 and 1991.



King Bairstow the Worst

A monumental legal case followed which has only just ended after seven years. More than 60,000 documents were submitted to the court. Mr Bairstow was in the witness box for 20 days. In July and December 1999, Mr Justice Nelson delivered an interminable judgment in two sections, covering more than 500 pages. It is vintage stuff.

Methodically and meticulously the judge dissected and destroyed every one of the main arguments put up by Bairstow and his acolytes. The judge's language made it clear again and again that he did not believe a word the great entrepreneur was saying. He said he found Bairstow's evidence that he did not know much about the "nice try" scam "improbable and unconvincing". Moreover: "I have found that Mr Bairstow and Mr Marcus knew full well that the 'nice try' scheme had been used to create additional profits some £25m of which were in the interim statement".

Of the directors' lies and half-truths told to analysts and banks, the judge said: "Any attempt to prevent a bad situation from becoming appalling by the giving of false information to analysts, and hence to clients, is an attempt to create a false market even if it is ultimately unsuccessful. Such an attempt would be a serious breach of duty by a director."

On Mr Bairstow's insistence that the company should pay him a more than generous pension boosted by hefty bonuses that were never earned, the judge found the relevant resolutions were illegal and Mr Bairstow was "in serious breach of his contract by virtue of the bad faith I have found". His two cruises at company expense were "in breach of his fiduciary duty" and he was ordered to pay back the £17,008 they cost.

The judge noted that Bairstow and his colleagues all claimed that the provision of free fishing on two stretches of river was legitimate corporate entertaining, but was struck by the fact that neither Bairstow nor anyone else could name a single guest in a single Queens Moat hotel who had fished either stretch of either river. The only person to benefit from the employment by the company of the two workers on the river was Mr Bairstow himself.

"I conclude," wrote the judge on page 408, "that Mr Bairstow obtained a substantial personal benefit from the services of the two men paid for by QMH but undisclosed. I conclude that Mr Bairstow benefited to the full extent of the salaries paid (£19,000) and that he must repay them".

In December 1999, the same judge heard the claims from Bairstow and his fellow directors for more dividends, and the counterclaim from the restructured company for repayment of dividends paid out by the old one. After an equally trenchant judgment he ordered the old directors (Bairstow and Co) to pay back the dividends they had paid when the company had no funds to meet them – £26.72m.

King John was so stunned by this comprehensive attack on his behaviour that he hired more lawyers to appeal against the Nelson judgment. Gouldens, the expensive city firm, represented him, as did Mr Charles Purle QC. The case took up five days by the court of appeal (Messrs Justice Robert Walker, Morritt and Lord Justice Sedley up). Finally, on 17 May, the court reached its verdict. Mr Bairstow and his colleagues must pay not £26.7m in wrongly-paid dividends. They must pay £78m, plus all costs.

LUCKIN HELL

The conclusion of the judicial hearings into Queens Moat coincided with the findings of the joint disciplinary scheme (JDS) set up by the Institute of Chartered Accountants to hear complaints against accountants. In March the scheme published its findings on Maurice Hart FCA, formerly of QMH's auditors, Bird Luckin. Bird had become a director of Queens Moat and chairman of the company's remuneration committee.

The JDS report severely censured Mr Hart for his role in false accounting at QMH, sacked him from the institute and ordered him to pay £50,000 costs. Into the bargain he was required to resign as chairman of the Chelsea Building Society.

The *Eye* asked Christopher Dickson, counsel to the institute's disciplinary scheme, why such scams and perks only seem to emerge after some big financial collapse.

He replied: "There is a tendency for people in charge of companies to conceal such things. That is what auditors are there to uncover. In this case Mr Hart as auditor was far too close to his client."

Last February Mr Bairstow wrote an article for the *Times* in which he argued against the "accusatory, wholly cynical and unsympathetic" behaviour of the department of trade inspectors into Queens Moat, and called for what he called the "star chamber" of the DTI inspectorate to be closed down.

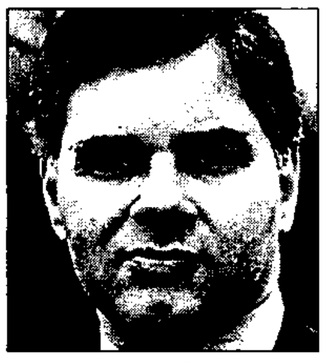
Somehow he got through his article without once mentioning the disgrace heaped on him and his company through the ordinary judicial process.

SACK 'N' SMEAR

THE story of the former south London training and enterprise council (SOLOTEC) and its courageous decision to sue three former women workers for £750,000 (see *Eyes* 1023 and 1029) has taken a new turn. One of the defendants, Carole Hackett, has discovered that Solotec was closely involved in the sacking and smearing of another women worker at one of the TEC's biggest and most prestigious former clients, the Corporate Service Group.

In 1996 Kate Shroder, the training manager at CSG, was rather disturbed to uncover widespread deceit in claims for public money made by a CSG training subsidiary, Sight and Sound. The amount wrongly claimed, she reckoned, was of the order of £250,000. Many of the false claims for training money had no substance whatever.

She reported all this to her bosses and was asked to cover up the process, which she refused to do. She was moved to different work. She then told Solotec about the false claims, and the large sums of public money the TEC was wrongly dishing out. The day after her talk with Solotec, she was sacked by CSG and systematically smeared in the press as the person responsible for the fraud she had exposed.



Jonathan Sayeed

Supported by Public Concern At Work, she sued CSG for libel and eventually, three years after her sacking, got a grovelling apology and damages of £20,000. The *Evening Standard* and education trade papers that had reprinted the company's press handouts smearing her, finally published more accurate reports. Eventually, and as a direct result of Kate Shroder's action against CSG, the company management was replaced (Jonathan Sayeed, the former training director, left in 1997 to become Tory mp for mid-Bedfordshire).

In 1996 Kate's case was strongly backed by "new" Labour. Stephen Byers asked a number of embarrassing questions. He and others were concerned about the fate of more than a billion pounds of public money poured into the TECS, which were composed almost entirely of businessmen and lawyers hand-picked by the Tory government. These problems have been solved by changing the names of the Tecs to Learning and Skills Councils and packing them with businessmen and lawyers hand-picked by, er, "new" Labour.

In the City

THE landmark conviction of the Guinness Four could be under an even greater threat than that posed by either the European court of human rights ruling against self-incrimination or the subsequent reference back to the court of appeal by the criminal cases review commission (CCRC) on similar grounds.

The police are investigating an allegation that a juror in the 1990 trial was prepared to sell a "not guilty" vote for £50,000 to one of the defendants and that although Scotland Yard was aware of the allegation no information was passed to the trial judge.

A trial judge must be informed of any matter relating to a jury which could influence their verdict so that a juror or the entire jury can then be discharged if the judge considers that necessary to protect the trial.

But this was not done in the Guinness case and could yet provide a lifeline on appeal to former chief executive Ernest Saunders and his three little share-supporting helpers – Gerald Ronson, Anthony Parnes and Jack Lyons – more substantial than the Strasbourg/CCRC verdict that their human rights were infringed because the evidence they were compelled to give to Department of Timidity & Inaction inspectors was used against them at the trial.

The ongoing police investigation threatens to be highly embarrassing to the Serious Farce Office, Scotland Yard and all those involved in the prosecution.

The allegation of the potentially corrupt juror emerged earlier this year as a result of evidence given in an unrelated trial by a police informer. The informer was said to have been told that a member of the jury was prepared to sell his vote.

The informer duly informed his Scotland Yard handler – a junior detective – of the potential for nobbling the Guinness jury. That tip was then passed to the fraud squad. The subsequent Yard investigation 11 years later has unearthed a record of the informer's report and that the information was passed on to senior Yard detectives. But there appears to be no record of what if any further action was taken.

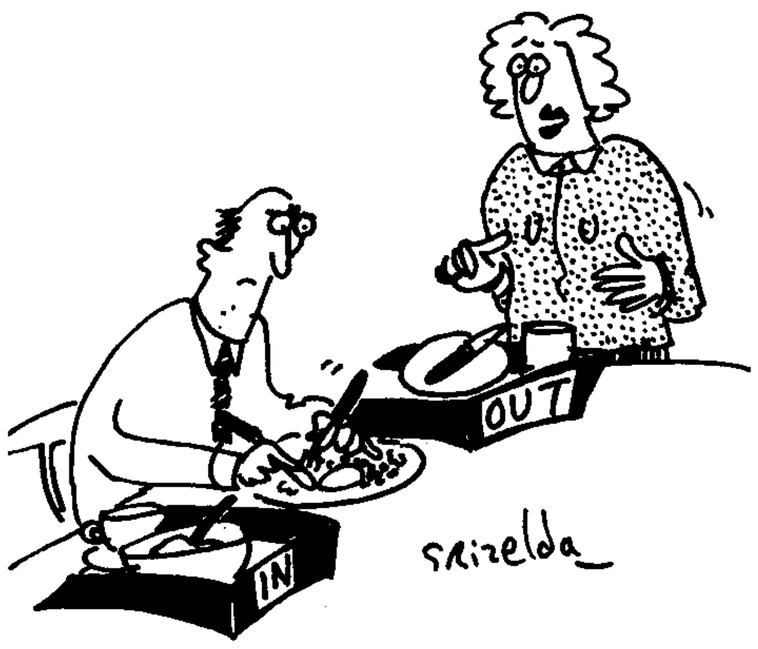
Indeed all those senior Yard detectives named are understood to have no recollection of the incident. Neither do any of the prosecution team led by John Chadwick, now a high court judge, and Barbara Mills, who subsequently headed the SFO and became director of public prosecutions.

The information about the potentially corrupt juror came some months after the Guinness trial began. The prospect that the trial might have to be abandoned would not have been attractive. However, that nuclear option was not inevitable as one juror can always be removed and the show go on.

It is also unclear so far just how seriously the informer's information was treated back in 1990. It was not coming directly from the juror but from a third party – a criminal who was related to the juror. The police, with or without consulting the lawyers, could have decided (and all forgotten) it was too insubstantial to act upon or to notify either prosecutors or the judge, Sir Denis Henry.

Certainly there is no evidence that anyone – either the informer or his associate or the juror – ever contacted any of the defendants with an offer to "fix" the trial verdict. Nor was the juror ever interviewed. However, the discovery of a record of the allegation and the fact that it was not notified to the trial judge may come back to haunt the already precariously poised convictions of Saunders & Co.

The SFO's greatest hope – apart from a ruling that the CCRC is wrong in seeking to apply the human rights act 2000 to events of 1990 – is that there can be little enthusiasm among senior judges for overturning the conviction of "Deadly Ernest". His conning of the appeal court into reducing his sentence by feigning oncoming Alzheimer's disease and his refusal to accept responsibility for



"I think you're becoming a workaholic"

secretly spending up to £200m of Guinness's money on an undisclosed, indemnified and illegal share-support operation during the 1986 bid battle for Distillers, did not impress the judges of the last Guinness appeal in 1995. The prospect of Saunders claiming vindication and seeking damages is unlikely to be any more palatable in 2001.

Senior judges and the British government indicated before the human rights act came into force last October that it was not to be used to revisit innumerable cases from yesteryear. The much loved legal phrase "robust" was used to signal the attitude to be taken to attempts to apply the European convention retrospectively. The SFO is relying on a recent appeal court ruling to block the CCRC from forcing an appeal on the Guinness verdicts, in part at least on the basis that it should not apply new laws to old cases.

That said there is an increasing view that if not

Stock Horror

Big Tobacco companies

(not to mention the smugglers and Bernie Ecclestone)

cheer four more years

Value today of £100 invested under 'anti-smoking' New Labour in...

Saunders then certainly Ronson, Parnes and Lyons with hindsight may have been treated unfairly: not in relation to what they did but how others who were equally if not more guilty fared.

Morgan Grenfell merchant banker Roger Seelig, the architect of the share-support scheme, walked away when he was deemed too ill to continue his trial. The expectation was that he would have gone to prison had the trial judge (Henry) not decided he could no longer defend himself. A move which ensured the trial descended into chaos and eventually had to be stopped because of the sensitive Seelig's temperamental outbursts. Like his client Saunders, Seelig staged a miracle recovery once the spectre of prison was removed.

Guinness director and Saunders' American *consigliere* Tom Ward was acquitted of his role for which he was paid an undeclared £5.2m of which he was to kickback £3m to Saunders.

Guinness finance director Olivier Roux knew all about the illegal share support operation and lied about what he knew but escaped by testifying against everyone else.

Ephraim Margulies, the boss of Berisford, was paid almost £2m for share support but escaped trial because his Geneva henchman who received the payment successfully prevented the SFO obtaining crucial documentary evidence until it was too late.

Cases against other advisers (such as Cazenove's David Mayhew) or share supporters (such as Lord Patrick Spens) were dropped or in some cases not even started. So only the Guinness Four have been punished for what the belated 1997 DTI report described as a cynical disregard for laws and regulations, cavalier use of company money and a contempt for truth and honesty.

But whether that post-facto unfairness alone is justification for overturning the first and only convictions the SFO obtained in the Guinness scandal is open to severe doubt.

SO the bearded wonder Richard Branson has had to hock his greatest asset, Virgin Atlantic airlines plus his hotels and holidays, to bankers

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE/RIGG

THE RETAIL ENVIRONMENT IS A COMPLEX DISCOURSE OF MEANINGS AND META STATEMENTS...
... NOW WHO CAN SHOW ME WHAT OUR BRAND MOST WANTS TO SAY ?
VERY GOOD !
PAY HERE

Lloyds TSB in order to keep the profitless prosperity that is his Virgin show on the road.

Virgin has often borrowed in the past so giving security is nothing new and neither is bank debt. But what is key in this instance is the timing and the Virgin response to disclosure of the Lloyd TSB floating charge.

Branson is being forced to borrow at a time when the airline – previously the group's cash cow – is struggling with rising costs and falling revenues. Since March last year it is also only 51-percent owned by Branson, the rest is held by the more traditionally business minded suits behind Singapore Airlines. So Virgin Atlantic cash cannot now be used without restriction to finance other loss-making or cash-hungry Branson ventures.

Branson collected a net £400m from selling 49 percent of Virgin Atlantic. But much of that has gone to repay debt elsewhere in the group. *Eye* 1024 revealed how a Branson company had repaid £176m owed by the heavily loss making Virgin retail operation, presumably from the Singapore cash.

Since then Branson has continued to splurge on new ventures while others such as mobile phones and Virgin Rail eat money. No wonder therefore that he is looking to sell Virgin.net, even though the likely price is heading south amid the dot-com wreckage. No wonder also that cautious bankers like Lloyds want more security for a £50m overdraft than they might have wanted a year ago in the wake of the Singapore deal.

As ever the Virgin PR machine response is to deny any financial difficulties and to trumpet to the *Sunday Telegraph* an already known but still not done US mobile deal with Sprint (linking it to the overdraft) to offset disclosure of the Lloyds floating charge by the *Observer*.

Cash problems were denied in early 2000 when Virgin refused to pay record companies the up to £80m they were owed. The Virgin retail losses question those denials and should make observers equally sceptical over the explanation for the Lloyds loan given Branson's current difficulties.

'Slicker'

Number crunching

£200,000

■ Estimated compensation package for two Isle of Wight prison officers "traumatised" after working with sex offenders.

£33,000

■ Maximum payment available to victims of child sex abuse.

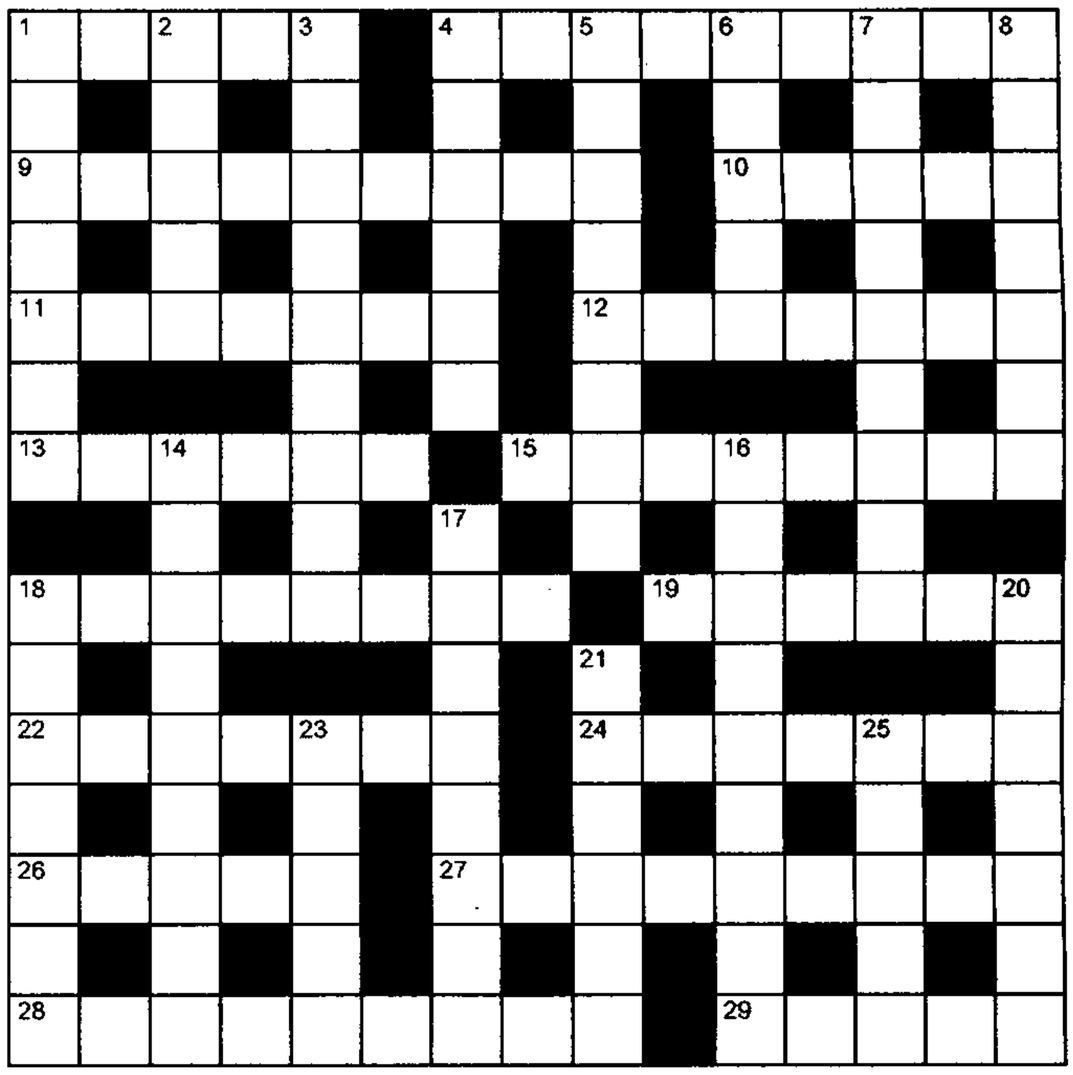
EYE CROSSWORD 185

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 22.6.01.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN.

184 winner
RONALD McCLEAN



ACROSS

1 Charles touching Camilla's next to middle hole ... (5)
4 ... a deep productive plot: something to make her randy and somewhere to do something about it ... (6,3)
9 ... – unreasonable, taking a girl sexually almost on the vertical? (1,3,5)
10 The country's so flipping protective of a Mowlam (5)
11 Women supervisors for whom union is out of the question (7)
12 Guts shown by boozers restricting Henry from having an erection (7)
13/26/15/19 High on heroin, TV's Jonathan, unable to have a row, is in trouble (2,4,5,7,1,6)
18 Topless Hague companion, catching cab back, reveals thing (8)
19 See 13
22 Force politician Hague's butt into new suit (7)
24 Pushy type: "Let's break in Ben" (7)
26 See 13
27 Thumb Callow – that's hardly demurely feminine (9)
28 Ridiculed, pissed, no Eye, without off-colour alternative (9)
29 Tip: taking on computing stuff is to fulfil a death wish (3,2)

DOWN

1 House offers continental cat piss (7)
2 Having other-worldliness is key to Archerism? No (5)
3 Graduate (sociology and other shit) – one who would make himself smart? (9)
4 Each little sod's wandering the city (6)
5 Young Mr Collins is weighed down by smallpox (8)
6 City "hostess" enthusiastically entertains (5)
7 Go about casually, showing arse, note, on stage (3,6)
8 See dad buggered on one – entered by Jordan definitively (4,3)
14 Attraction of an earnest plea for some rumpy-pumpy (3,6)
16 Monumental tribute to a stiff Mick Jagger? (9)
17 Artist's jiggling tits sore (8)
18 Non-PC WPC's quite reasonable bust (4,3)
20 Each short emission shows effective range of one's organ (7)
21 Fraud: maybe Piers Morgan's humiliated (6)
23 Yard briefly to OK laundered capital (5)
25 Landowner's shagged outside castle (5)

SOLUTION TO CROSSWORD 184

ACROSS: 1/10/18 Chicken tikka masala 5 Pontiac 9 Affidavit 11 Sides 12 Landslide 13 Only just 15 Weight 20 Mugs game 23 Storyline 24 Ether 25 Zappa 26 Go begging 27 Spray-on 28 Everton.

DOWN: 1/23 Classroom sizes 2 Infidel 3 Kudos 4 Novelist 5 Potent 6 Net assets 7 Inkling 8/16 Chase the dragon 14 Jelly baby 17 Queen bee 19 Snooper 21 Atheist 22 Virgin 24 Eagle.

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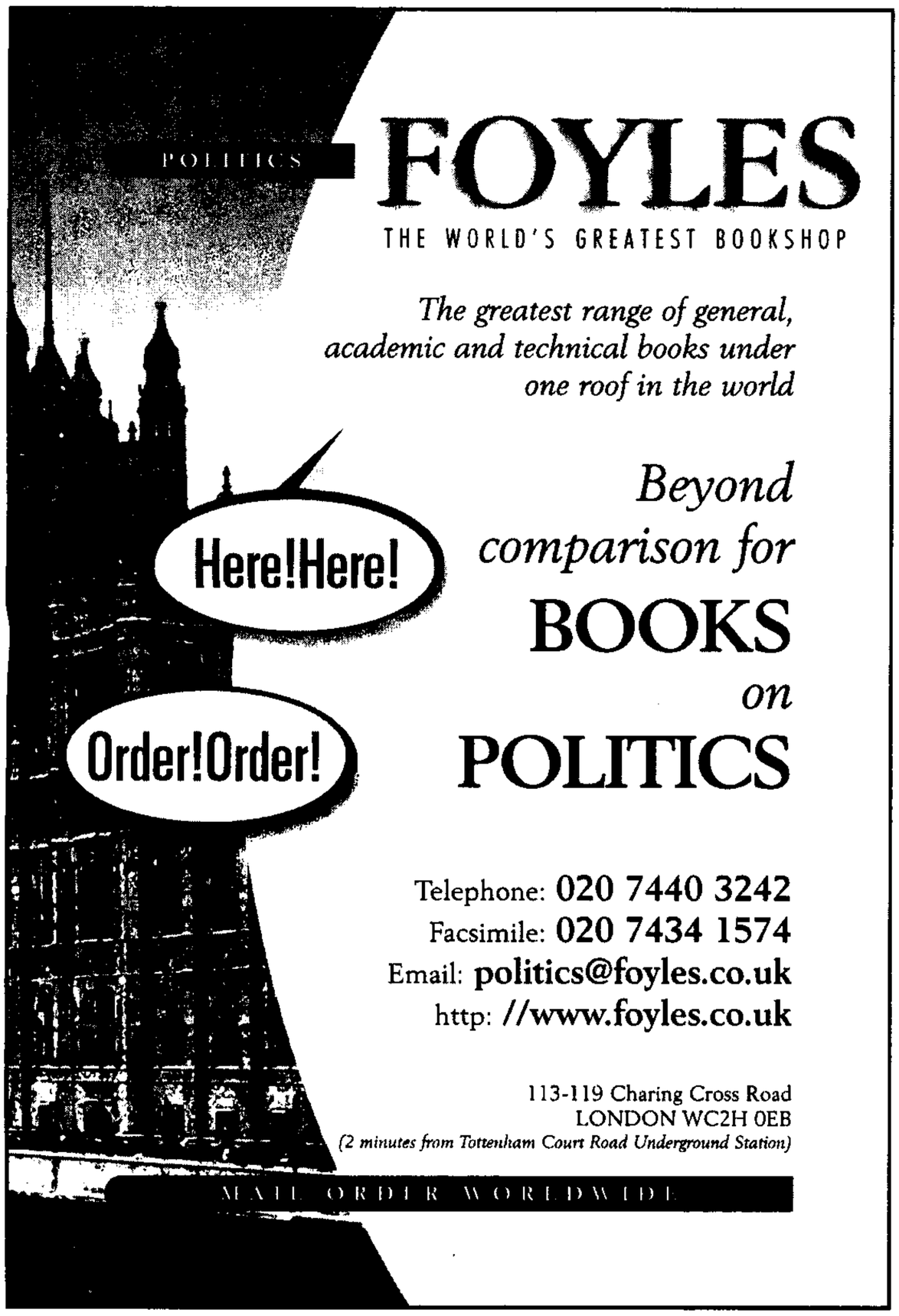

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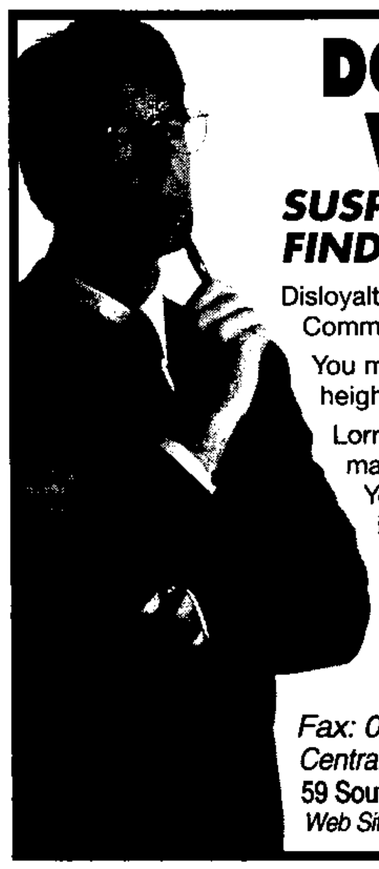

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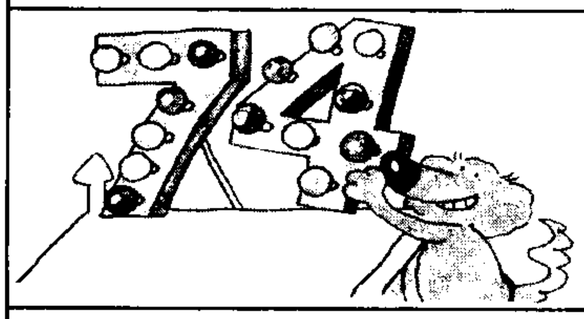

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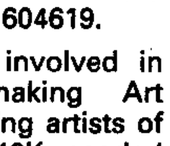

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